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THE WHIRLWIND

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

Fiction (English)

THE WHIRLWIND

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Lying Prophets.
Children of the Mist.
Sons of the Morning.
The Striking Hours.
The River.
The American Prisoner.
The Secret Woman.
Knock at a Venture.
The Portreeve.
My Devon Year.

RUDDYFORD. [*Frontispiece.*

THE WHIRLWIND

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS 1862-

FIFTH EDITION

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THE WHIRLWIND

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

THE MAN ON THE CAIRN

Fifty years ago a wild and stormy sky spread above the gorges of Lyd, and the vale was flooded in silver mist, dazzling by contrast with the darkness round about. Great welter of vapour, here radiant, here gloomy, obscured the sinking sun; but whence he shone, vans of wet light fell through the tumultuous clouds, and touched into sudden, humid, and luminous brilliancy the forests and hills beneath.

A high wind raged along the sky and roared over the grave-crowned bosom of White Hill on Northern Dartmoor. Before it, like an autumn leaf, one solitary soul appeared to be blown. Beheld from afar, he presented an elongated spot driven between earth and air; but viewed more closely, the man revealed unusual stature and great physical strength. The storm was not thrusting him before it; accident merely willed that the wind and he should be fellow-travellers.

Grey cairns of the stone heroes of old lie together on the crest of White Hill, and the man now climbed one of these heaps of granite, and stood there, and gazed upon an immense vision outspread easterly against oncoming night.

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It was as though the hours of darkness, tramping lowly in the sun's wake, had thrown before them pioneers of cloud. Two ranges of jagged tors swept across the skyline and rose, grey and shadowy, against the purple of the air. Already their pinnacles were dissolved into gloom, and from Great Links, the warden of the range, right and left to lower elevations, the fog banks rolled and crept along under the naked shoulders of the hills. Over this huge amphitheatre the man's eyes passed; then, where Ger Tor lifts its crags above Tavy, another spirit was manifest, and evidences of humanity became apparent upon the fringes of the Moor. Here trivial detail threaded the confines of inviolate space; walls stretched hither and thither; a scatter of white dots showed where the sheep roamed; and, at valley-bottom, a mile under the barrows of White Hill, folded in peace, with its crofts and arable land about it, lay a homestead. Rounded clumps of beech and sycamore concealed the dwelling; the farm itself stood at the apex of a triangle, whose base widened out into fertile regions southerly. Meadows, very verdant after hay harvest, extended here, and about the invisible house stood ricks, outbuildings, that glimmered cold as water under corrugated iron roofs, and a glaucous patch of garden green, where flourished half an acre of cabbage. One field had geese upon it; in another, two horses grazed. A leat drawn from Tavy wound into the domains of the farm, and a second rivulet fell out of the Moor beside it. Cows were being driven into the yard. An earth-coloured man tended them, and a black and white speck raced violently about in their rear. A dog's faint barking might be heard upon the hill when the wind lulled.

The contrast between the ambient desolation and this sequestered abode of human life impressed itself upon the spectator's slow mind. Again he ranged the ring of hills with his eyes; then lowered them to Ruddyford Farm. Despite the turmoil of the hour and the hum and roar of the wind; despite the savage glories of a silver sunset

THE CAIRNS ON WHITE HILL

[*To face p. 2.*

westerly and the bleak and leaden aspect of the east; despite the rain that now touched his nape coldly and flogged the forgotten tomb on which he stood; this man's heart was warm, and he smiled into the comfortable valley and nodded his head with appreciation.

The rain and the wind had been his companions from childhood; the sunshine and the seasons belonged to him as environment of daily life. He minded the manifestations of nature as little as the ponies that now scampered past him in a whinnying drove; he was young and as yet knew no pain; he regarded the advent of winter without fear, and welcomed the equinox of autumn as indifferently as the first frost or the spring rain. These things only concerned him when they bore upon husbandry and the business of life.

Now, like a map rolled out before his eyes, lay the man's new home and extended the theatre of his future days. Upon this great stage he would move henceforth, pursue hope, fulfil destiny, and perchance win the things that he desired to win.

The accidents of wind and storm surrounding this introduction did not influence the newcomer or affect his mind. Intensity and rare powers of faith belonged to him; but imagination was little indicated in his character. His interest now poured out upon the cultivated earth spread below, and had his actual future habitation been visible instead of hidden, it had not attracted him. That behind the sycamores there stood a roof-tree henceforth to shield his head, mattered nothing; that within its walls were now congregated his future master and companions, did not impress itself upon his thoughts. He was occupied with the fertile acres, now fading into night, and with the cattle that pastured round about upon the Moor. Familiar with the face of the earth seen afar off, he calculated to a few tons what hay had recently been saved here, appreciated certain evidences of prosperity, as revealed by the aspect and position of the fields; noted with satisfaction the marks of agri-

cultural wisdom; frowned at signs that argued other views than his own.

He pictured himself at work, longed to be at it, yearned for outlets to his great, natural energies and vigorous bent of mind. Death had thrown him into the market of men, and, after three months' idleness, he found a new task, on a part of the Moor remote from his former labours. But the familiar aspects of the waste attracted him irresistibly. He rejoiced to return, to feel the heath under his feet, and see the manner of his future toil clearly written under his eyes. It seemed to him that Ruddyford, with its garden, tenements, and outlying fields, was but an unfinished thing waiting for his sure hand to complete. He would strengthen the walls, widen the borders, heighten the welfare of this farm. No glance backward into the glories of the sunset did he give, for he was young. The peace of Lydford's woodland glades and the lush, low lands beneath, drew no desire from him. Villages, hamlets, and the gregarious life of them, attracted him not at all. The sky to live under, a roof to sleep under, Dartmoor to work upon: these were the things that he found precious at this season. And Fate had granted them all.

Clouds touched his face coldly; the nightly mists swept down and concealed the hills and valleys spread between. For a moment Ruddyford peeped, like a picture, from a frame of cobweb colour. Then it was hidden by sheets of rain.

The man leapt off the grave of that other man, whose ashes in the morning of days had here been buried. So long had he stood motionless that it seemed as though a statue, set up to some vanished hero, grew suddenly incarnate, and, animated by the spirit of the mighty dead, now hastened from this uplifted loneliness down into the highways of life.

A fierce torrent scourged the hill as the traveller hurried from it. He was drenched before he reached the farmhouse door. A dog ran out and growled and showed its teeth at

him. Then, in answer to his knock, an old man came slowly down the stone-paved passage.

"Ah, you'll be Mr. Daniel Brendon, no doubt? Your box was fetched up from Mary Tavy this marning. You catched that scat o' rain, I'm afraid. Come in an' welcome, an' I'll show you where you'm to lie."

CHAPTER II

RUDDYFORD

A FEATURE of Devon are those cultivated peninsulas of land that thrust forward up the surrounding coombs and point into Dartmoor's bosom. The foothills of this great tableland are fledged with forests and rich with fertile earth; but here and there, greatly daring, the farms have fought upward and reclaimed a little of the actual desolation.

Ruddyford was driven like a wedge into that stony wilderness beneath the Moor's north-western ramparts. White Hill sheltered it from the west; the flank of Ger Tor sloped easterly; to the south flowed Tavy through fertile tilth, grey hamlets, and green woods. Only northward was little immediate shelter; and upon the north Daniel Brendon opened his eyes when dawned the first day of his new life.

His chamber window showed him the glitter of a soaking world spread under grey of dawn. His little room was sparsely furnished, and the whitewashed walls were naked. He dressed, prayed, then turned to a wooden box and unpacked his few possessions. He stowed his clothes in a

yellow chest-of-drawers with white china handles; his desk he put in the window, on a deep sill, the breadth of the wall. His boots and a pair of felt slippers he placed in a row. Some pictures remained. One represented his father and mother, both six years dead. The photograph was smeared with yellow, but the stain had missed the faces. An old, dogged man, in his Sunday black, sat in a chair and stared stolidly at the beholder; beside him stood a thin, tall woman of anxious eyes and gentle mouth. The face of the man explained the expression of his wife. This picture Daniel hung up on a nail; and beside it he placed another—the portrait of his only sister. There had been but two of them. His sister resembled her mother, and was married to a small tradesman at Plymouth. Her health caused Daniel uneasiness, for it was indifferent. Lastly, from the bottom of his box, he took an illuminated text, and set it over the head of his bed. His father had given it to him.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom."

Daniel often reflected that at least he might claim the beginning of wisdom, for greatly he feared.

Outwardly Brendon was well made, and handsome on a mighty scale. If he ever gloried it was in his strength. He stood four inches over six feet, yet, until another was placed beside him, did not appear very tall, by reason of his just proportions. He was a brown man with small, triangular whiskers and a moustache that he cut straight across his lip, like a tooth-brush. The cropped hair on his face spoilt it, for the features were finely moulded, and, in repose, revealed something of the large, soulless, physical beauty of a Greek statue of youth. His mind, after the manner of huge men, moved slowly. His eyes were of the character of a dog's: large, brown, innocent, and trustful, yet capable of flashing into passionate wrath or smouldering with emotion.

A noise, that Daniel made in hammering up his text, brought somebody to the door. It was the man who had

welcomed him overnight, and he entered the newcomer's private chamber without ceremony.

"Hold on, my son!" he said. "You'll wake master, then us shall all have a very unrestful day. Mr. Woodrow be a poor sleeper, like his faither afore him, and mustn't be roused till half after seven. He bides in the room below this, so I hope as you'll always go about so gentle of a morning as your gert bulk will let 'e."

"So I will then," said Daniel. "'Tis lucky I've been moving wi'out my boots. I tread that heavy, Mr. Prout."

Old John Prout looked with admiration and some envy at the young man.

"'Tis a great gift of Providence to have such a fine body and such power of arm. But things be pretty evenly divided, when you've wit to see all round 'em. You'll have to go afoot all your life; no horse will ever carry you."

Daniel laughed.

"Nought but a cart-horse, for sartain. But my own legs be very good to travel upon."

"Without a doubt—now; wait till you'm up my age. Then the miles get dreadful long if you've got to trust to your feet. I've my own pony here, and I should be no more use than the dead branch of a tree without him."

The withered but hard old man looked round Daniel's room. He had lived all his life at Ruddyford; he was a bachelor, and devoted his life to his master. Reynold Woodrow, the present farmer's father, Prout had obeyed, but secretly disliked. Hilary Woodrow, the living owner of Ruddyford, he worshipped with devoutness and profoundly admired. The man could do no wrong in his servant's eyes.

Now John regarded Daniel's text, where it shone with tarnished crimson and gold.

"You'm a religious man, then?"

"I hope so."

"Well, why not? For my part, I like to see the chaps go to church or chapel of a Sunday. Master don't go, but he's no objection to it. He'd so soon have a Roman as a Plymouth Brother, so long as they stood to work week-days and earned their money. 'Tis a tidy tramp to worship, however."

"Why, Lydford ban't above four miles."

"That's the distance. As for me, I don't say I'm not right with God, for I hope that I am. But, touching outward observances, I don't follow 'em. More do Mr. Woodrow, though a better man never had a bad cough."

"I'd fear to face a day's work until I'd gone on my knees," declared Brendon, without self-consciousness.

"Ah! at my time of life, us bow the heart rather than the knee—specially if the rheumatics be harboured at that joint, as in my case. But a very fine text for a bed-head, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom.' And I'll tell you another thing. The love of the Lord is the end of it. That ban't in the Bible, yet a living word as my life have taught me. I go my even way and ban't particular about prayer, nor worship, nor none of that. And as for the bread and wine, I haven't touched 'em for a score of years; yet I love the Lord an' trust Him, for all the world like a babby trusts its mother's breast for breakfast. 'Tis an awful simple religion."

"Simple enough to lose your salvation, I should reckon. If you believe, you did ought to tremble. 'Tis for God A'mighty to love you, not for you to love Him so loud, and yet do nought to show it. No prayers, no sacrament, no worship—what's that but to be a heathen man—begging your pardon?"

"You'll see different if you stop along of us. 'Tis a good working faith that breeds my peace of mind and master's. My fault is that I'm too easy with you chaps. Even the dogs know what a soft old silly I be."

Brendon considered this confession, and it brought him to a subject now upon his mind.

"What's my job exactly? How do I stand? I'd hoped to have a bit of authority myself here, along of my good papers."

"Farmer will tell 'e all about that after his breakfast. The things[1] will be your job, I suppose. But he'll explain himself. He's made of kindness, yet no common sort of man. Them as know him would go through fire an' water for him. However, 'tis an art to know him, and only comes with patience."

"Not married?"

"No, nor like to be. He offered hisself to a cat-hearted minx down to Peter Tavy; and she took him; and 'twas all settled. Then there comed along, a cousin of hers, who has a linen-draper's shop near London, and be damned if she didn't change her mind! It set Hilary Woodrow against women, as well it might. There's only one female in this house, and you can hardly say she's a woman. Merely a voice and a pair of eyes and a pair of hands, and a few bones tied up in a petticoat. My sister, Tabitha—as good a soul as ever fretted a houseful of males. 'Bachelors' Hall' they call this place down to Lydford. And so 'tis, for only the ploughman, Joe Tapson, have ever been married; and he'll tell you plainly, without false feeling, that the day that made him a widow-man, was the first he ever thanked his God for."

A thin voice came up the stairs.

"John—breaksis!"

"Come to breakfast," said Mr. Prout. "Then I'll walk around the place with 'e, afore the master be ready."

So dull was the dawn, that firelight shone in the polished surfaces of the kitchen, and its genial glow made the morning chill and lifeless by contrast.

Three men already sat at the table, and John Prout took the head of it. The newcomer was listened to with courtesy, and his extraordinary size won him open admiration.

[1] *Things.* Cattle. A moor-man always speaks of 'things' when he means flocks and herds.

"A good big un's the best that woman breeds," said the widower, Tapson. He was himself a man somewhat undersized. He had but one eye, a wrinkled brown skin, and a little goat-beard; but the rest of his face was shaved clean once a week—on Sunday morning.

"No tender spot?" he asked. "So often you gert whackers have a soft place somewhere that brings you down to the level of common men when it comes to work. 'Tis the heart gets tired most often, along wi' the power o' pumping the blood to the frame."

"No weak spot that I know about, thank God," said Daniel.

"Us'll have to get up a wraslin' bout betwixt you and the 'Infant,'" declared another labourer, called Agg. He was a red man of average size, with a pleasant and simple countenance.

"The 'Infant's' a chap to Lydford," he explained. "He was at a shop up in London, but got home-sick an' come back to the country. Very near so large as you be."

"I know about him," answered Brendon. "'Tis William Churchward, the schoolmaster's son. There's a bit more of him below the waist than what there is of me; but I'm a lot harder and I stand two inch taller."

"You could throw him across the river," said Joe Tapson.

There came a knock at the door while breakfast progressed, and a girl appeared. She was a wild-looking, rough-haired little thing of sixteen. She entered with great self-possession, took off her sunbonnet, shook her black hair out of her eyes, and set down a large round bundle in a red handkerchief.

The men laughed; Miss Prout's voice rose to its highest cadences, and her thin shape swayed with indignation.

"Again, Susan! Twice in two months. 'Tis beyond belief, and a disgrace to the family!"

"Well, Aunt Tab, who wouldn't? Last night Aunt Hepsy didn't give me no supper, because I dropped the salt-

cellar in the apple-tart—a thing anybody might do. And I'm leery as a hawk, so I am."

"There's no patience in you," grumbled Mr. Prout's sister. "Why for can't you understand the nature of your Aunt Hepsy, and make due allowances for it? Such a trollop as you—such a fuzzy-poll, down-at-heels maid—be the very one to drive her daft. 'Twas a Christian act to take you—friendless orphan that you be; but as to service—how you think you'll ever rise to it, I can't say."

Susan's uncle had given her some breakfast, and she ate heartily, and showed herself quite at home.

"Aunt Hepsy's always a bit kinder after I've runned away, however," exclaimed the girl; "that is, after she've told me what she thinks about me."

Daniel Brendon observed Susan closely, for she sat on a kitchen form beside him at Mr. Prout's right hand. A neat little budding shape she had, and small brown hands, like a monksy's.

Presently she looked up at him inquiringly.

"This here's Mr. Brendon," explained Agg. Then he turned to Daniel.

"The maiden be Mr. Prout's niece, you must know. She's with the family of Weekes to Lydford, learning to get clever for sarvice. But she'm always running away—ban't you, Susan? Here's the mustard to your bacon, my dear."

"I run away when I'm that pushed," explained Susan, with her mouth full. "'Tis a lesson to 'em. I wouldn't run from Uncle Weekes, for a kinder man never lives; but Aunt Hepsy's different."

"For that matter, I dare say Phil Weekes would be jolly glad to run along with you sometimes, if he could," said Tapson. But the remark annoyed Miss Prout, and she reproved him sharply.

"You'll do better to mind your own affairs, Joe. Ban't no business of yours to talk rude about other people's families; an' I'll thank you not to do so. No man ever

had a better wife than Philip Weekes have got; which I say, though she is my own flesh and blood; and 'tis a very improper thing all you men siding with this here silly little toad; and you ought to stop it, John, as well you know."

"So I ought," admitted Mr. Prout. "Now, up an' away. And, after dinner, I be going into Lydford, so you can come back along wi' me, Susan."

"Let me bide one day," pleaded the girl. "Then I can help Aunt Tab wi' the washing."

"Right well you know the time to come here, you cunning wench!" said her aunt. "Some of these days, Susie, Hephzibah Weekes won't take 'e back at all. Her patience ban't her first virtue, as you ought to know by this time."

"So I do. But her power of keeping money in her pocket be. She'll always take me back, because I'm the only maiden as she'll ever get for nought. She says I ought to pay her!"

"So you ought, if you could. Didn't you go to her after your mother died, wi'out a smurry to your back? There's no gratitude in girls nowadays. Well, you can bide till to-morrow; and, so soon as you've done, you'd best to light wash-house fire, while I clear up."

Brendon walked round Ruddyford presently with the head man, and saw much to admire and not a little to regret. He longed to be at work that he might reveal his modern principles and knowledge; but Mr. Prout was not much impressed by Daniel's opinions, and showed a stout, conservative spirit.

"You'm a great man for new-fangled notions, I see," he remarked. "Well, you must tell master 'bout it. For my part, I've made up my mind on most questions of farming by now, and can't change no more. But he'll hear you. Trust him for that. He hears us all with wonderful large patience for a young man of his age. I'm

glad you like the place. 'Tis a funny old sort of a spot, but I wouldn't go nowheres else for a hat of money."

At ten o'clock Hilary Woodrow came into the kitchen, where his new man was waiting for him.

"Morning, Tabitha," said the farmer. Then he turned to Brendon.

"Come this way, please. We'll talk in the air."

They walked together beside the great patch of cabbage that Daniel had marked from the hills.

"Your character was very good, and I'm glad to have you here," began the farmer.

He indicated the work he expected, and the general rules, hours and regulations of Ruddyford, while Daniel listened in silence.

Hilary Woodrow was a thin man of medium height and rather refined appearance. His colour was dark and his face clearly cut, with small, delicate features. His voice was gentle, and an air of lassitude sat upon him, as though life already tended to weariness. His age was thirty-five, but he looked rather more, and a touch of grey already appeared about the sides of his head. To Daniel he appeared a very fragile being, and yet his clear, cold voice and his choice of words impressed the labourer, though he knew not why. Brendon felt that his master possessed a master's power. He found himself touching his forelock instinctively, when the other stopped sometimes and looked him straight in the face.

This secret of strength was built upon dual foundations. Woodrow possessed a strong will, and he had enjoyed an unusual education. His father and mother, fired by ambition for their only child, had sent him to Tavistock Grammar School. Thence he went to London to read law, but neither the place nor the profession suited him. He learnt much, but gladly returned to Dartmoor when his father died suddenly and left his mother alone. At her husband's death, Hester Woodrow's dreams for the boy instantly crumbled, and she was well content that her son

should succeed Reynold Woodrow and remain beside her. Hilary's health offered another reason, for London had done him little good in respect of that. He was a sensual man.

The large events of his life numbered few. First came experience of the metropolis; and since one must wither a while in cities before the full, far-reaching message of nature can be read, his years in London largely helped to teach young Woodrow the meaning and the blessing of his home. Then fell a father's death; and it awoke him to experience of grief and the weight of responsibility. Following upon these enlightenments came love. He was accepted, and jilted after the wedding-day had been named. Lastly, just before his thirtieth birthday, his mother died and left him alone in the world, for he had no near relations. Ruddyford was a freehold farm, and now Hilary Woodrow owned it. On his mother's death he had felt disposed to throw up all and travel. But he found himself uneasy in mind and body if long absent from the high grounds of the Moor; and finally he determined to spend his days as his father had done before him.

Much did the Prouts desire a mistress at Ruddyford for the comfort of everybody concerned there; but Hilary, after his reverse, held aloof from women. Indeed, his life was very solitary for so young a man. He did not make friends, and, among his equals, was cold and reserved. He felt a little nervous of his health, and showed a sensitiveness to weather that puzzled the folk who are superior to that weakness.

Thus he stood, at the limits of youth, and gazed ahead without much enthusiasm or interest. He found great pleasure in books and in riding. He did not smoke, and drank but little. His heart was kind, and he performed good deeds, if they were easy to perform. His mind was of a sceptic bent, but he prided himself justly on a generous tolerance. Most men liked him and wished that they knew him better; but he was a character more likely to be understood by women than men.

Daniel Brendon listened to his duties, and found himself disappointed. No special department awaited him; no control was destined to be placed in his hands. He had come to help with the rough and varied work of the farm. It was expected of him to turn his hand to anything and everything; to take his daily task from John Prout, and to stand on the same footing as the other labourers.

"Mr. Prout said something about the beasts," he explained, slowly. "'Twas my hope, master, as you'd put a bit of trust in me, seeing my papers."

"I put trust in everybody. You'll never find a more trustful man. It's a secret of farming to trust—when you can."

"But I had the handling of a power of things at Postbridge."

"So you will have with me."

"A man an' a boy under my orders, too."

Woodrow laughed.

"I see. You'll only have three dogs under your orders here."

"Not that I want——"

"Yes, you do—we all do. You'll get power enough, Brendon, if 'tis in you. Power comes out of ourselves. Go ahead and do your work. Perhaps, six months hence, you'll be so powerful that we shall have to part company —eh?"

"I know my job very well."

"Of course you do. I shouldn't want you otherwise. If your will is as strong as your legs and arms, you ought to have a farm of your own before long. How old are you?"

"Twenty-five, master."

"I'd give Ruddyford twice over to have your limbs."

"They are so good as yours, while you pay for 'em."

"Go ahead, then. Take a tramp round before dinner, and see what you think of those heifers up the hill. I've had an offer for them, but don't feel quite satisfied. Tell

me what you reckon they are worth—taking the whole five-and-twenty together."

In two minutes Daniel was away with a couple of sheep-dogs after him. He reflected on this, his first piece of work, and it pleased him. He was an accurate judge of stock and knew that he could estimate very closely the value of the heifers.

CHAPTER III

A THEATRE OF FAILURE

With his thoughts for company Brendon strode upon an errand to the high Moor. He had been at Ruddyford a fortnight, and liked the people, but his master troubled him, for he did not understand Mr. Woodrow's attitude. The farmer's silence puzzled Daniel more than hard words had done. His consolation was that a like reticence and apparent indifference were displayed to all.

Now Brendon climbed aloft to the lonely bosom of Amicombe Hill. He breasted the eastern shoulder of Great Links, and then stood a moment, startled by the strangeness of the scene before him. This field of industry had already passed into the catalogue of man's failures upon Dartmoor, and ruin marked the spot. Round about, as though torn by giant ploughs, the shaggy slope of the hill was seamed and ripped with long lines of darkness. A broken wall or two rose here and there, and radiating amid the desolation of bog and mire, old tramways ran red. In the midst of

THE OLD PEAT WORKS.

[*To face p.* 16.

these morasses stood the peat works, like a mass of simmering, molten metal poured out upon the Moor and left to rust there. Low stone buildings with rotten roofs, gleaming corrugated iron still white, black walls, broken chimneys, and scattered débris of stone and steel huddled here in mournful decay. Everywhere cracked wheels, broken trolleys, twisted tram-lines, and dilapidated plant, sank into wreck and rot amid the growing things. Like a sea the waste billowed round about and began to swallow and smother this futile enterprise. Leaks and cracks gaped everywhere. Raw mountains of peat slowly grew green again under heath and grass and the wild sorrel. Here were miles of rusty wire in huge red tangles, that looked as though the lightning had played at cat's-cradle with them; here washes of dim and dingy green swept the hills; here flat liverworts and tumid fungus ate the woodwork like cancers; here beds of emerald sphagnum swallowed the old peat-knives and spades. Sections of the peat laid bare showed a gradual change in quality, from the tough and fibrous integument of heather-root and grass, to a pure cake, growing heavier and darker, until, two yards from the surface, it was inky black and soft as butter. From six to ten feet of this fuel spread in a layer of many million tons over the granite bones of Amicombe Hill. Immense quantities were already removed, but the enterprise failed utterly, and the great hill, where so much of sanguine toil had been expended, still stretched under the sky with little more than scratches on its face.

Brendon approached this cemetery of hope, to find a ghost there. The buildings, dwarfed by distance, soon towered above him as he reached them, and he found that they contained huge chambers internally blackened by the peat, yet illuminated by shafts of outer light that pierced into them. Through broken windows and gaping walls day came, and revealed immense, silent wheels, and bars thrust out of hollows, and deep pits. Great pipes stretched from darkness into darkness again; drums and tanks and forges

stood up about him; mysterious apertures sundered the walls and gaped in the floors; strange implements appeared; stacks of peat-cake rose, piled orderly; broken bricks, silent machinery, hillocks of rubbish and dirt, heaps of metal and balks of timber loomed together from a dusky twilight, and choked these stricken and shadowy halls.

Dead silence reigned here to Daniel's ears, fresh from the songs of the wind on the Moor. But, as his eyes grew accustomed to the velvety darkness and fitful illumination of these earth-stained chambers, so his ears also were presently tuned to the peace of the place. Then, through the stillness, there came a sound, like some great creature breathing in sleep. It was too regular for the wind, too loud for any life. It panted steadily, and the noise appeared to come from beneath the listener's feet.

Daniel lifted his voice, and it thundered and clanged about him, like a sudden explosion. A dozen echoes wakened, and he guessed that no such volume of sound had rolled through these iron-vaulted chambers since the machinery ceased.

"Be you here, Mr. Friend?" he shouted, and all the stagnant air rang.

No answering voice reached him; but the stertorous breathing ceased, and presently came the fall of slow feet. A head rose out of the earth; then it emerged, and a body and legs followed.

"Come down below, will 'e? I can't leave my work," said the apparition; then it sank again, and Brendon followed it down a flight of wooden steps. One cracked under his weight.

"Mind what you'm doing," called back the leader. "They'm rotten as touchwood in places."

Below was a forge, which Daniel had heard panting, and beside it stood retorts and various rough chemical appliances. The operator returned to his bellows and a great ray of hot, red light flashed and waned, flashed and waned.

Like some ancient alchemist amid his alembics, the older

man now appeared, and his countenance lent aid to the simile, for it was bearded and harsh and bright of eye. Gregory Friend might have been sixty, and looked almost aged under these conditions. His natural colour was fair, but a life in the atmosphere of the great fuel-beds had stained his visible parts to redness. His very beard, folk said, was dyed darker than nature. He stood there, a strange man of fanatic spirit; and his eyes showed it. They burnt with unconquerable hope; they indicated a being to whom some sort of faith must be the breath of life. It remained for Daniel to discover the articles of that faith; and they were not far to seek.

"I be come from Ruddyford," said the labourer. "Master wants four journeys o' peat, and I was to say that the carts will be up Tuesday."

Friend nodded.

"'Tis ready; and a thousand journeys for that matter. Look here. The Company have sent these samples from Wales. What do 'e think of 'em?"

"I ban't skilled in peat," said Daniel. "It seems all right."

"Not to my eye. Peat be sent up to me from Scotland and Wales and Ireland; and I try it with my tools here. But 'tis trash—all trash—alongside our peat. There's less tar to it, an' less gas to it, an' less power o' heat to it. Do 'e see these?"

The expert handed Daniel a number of little, heavy, black cakes, as hard as a brick.

"You've made 'em, I suppose?"

"'Tis Amicombe peat—the best in the world. Better than coal, you might almost say. We dry and we powder; then we build the cakes an' put 'em in thicky press till they are squeezed as hard as stone. There's your fuel! 'Twill smelt iron in the furnace! What other fashion o' peat but ours can do it? None as ever I heard tell about. Look at this here tar. What other peat will give you such stuff? None—none but Amicombe Hill. Millions of tons waiting

—thousands of pounds of good money lying here under this heath—waiting."

"And 'twill have to wait, seemingly."

"That's the point. People think the Company's dead. But it ban't dead. I've seen the whole history. I was among the first they took on. I helped from the beginning. It ban't dead, only in low water. They may start again—they must. 'Tis madness to stop now."

"You believe in it?"

"I'd stake my last shilling in it. For that matter, I have done so. Company owes me fifty pounds less three, this very minute. But if the wise ones have their way, I'll get five hundred for my fifty yet."

Mr. Friend's fire had sunk low; into the darkness from above shot one ray of daylight, blue by contrast with the gloom of the laboratory.

"Come an' have a look at the engine," said the caretaker. "'Tis near twenty year since steam was up; and I've given such watchful heed to it that us might be running again in a week—but for a plate here and there that's eaten away."

Brendon had wit to perceive that Mr. Friend's perspective was distorted in this matter. As one who lives intimately with a companion, and cleaves too close to mark the truth of Time's sure carving on a loved face, so this enthusiast quite failed to appreciate the real state of the peat works, or their absolute and utter ruination.

The Company indeed lingered, but any likelihood of reconstruction was remote. From time to time engineers appeared upon the scene, made suggestions, and revived Gregory Friend; but nought came of these visits: everything remained stationary save the hand of Nature.

Daniel praised a fifteen-horse-power engine, which the guardian of this desolation kept oiled and clean; he heard the peat expert's story, and discovered that, while Friend's belief in man had long since perished, his belief in Amicombe Hill and its hoarded possibilities was boundless and

unshaken. This shaggy monster, heather-clad, with unctuous black fen rolling ten feet thick over its granite ribs, was his God. He worshipped it, ministered to it, played high priest to it. They walked together presently over the shining ridges where black pools lay and chocolate-coloured cuttings shone, fringed with the pink bog-heather. Mr. Friend thrust his fingers into the peat and reviewed a thousand great scads, where they stood upright, propped together to dry. In Gregory's eyes, as they wandered upon that scene forlorn, were the reverence of a worshipper and the pride of a parent.

"They've never yet proved it," he said. "But I have. Not an acre of these miles but I've tested. 'Tis all good, right through."

"But master was talking a bit ago, and he said that your peat-cake be more expensive than coals, when all's said."

"He's wrong, then. Ton per ton you could have the pressed cake for a thought less than coal—if they'd only listen to me. But there 'tis; they'm stiff-necked, and send down empty fools instead of practical people. They talk folly and pocket their cash and go; and nothing comes of it; and I be left to wait till they hear me. A sensible man will happen along presently. Until then, the place is in my hands. Only I and the God that made this here hill, know what be in it. China clay, mind you, as well! I've showed it to 'em. I've put it under their noses, but they won't hearken."

"D'you live up here?"

"I do—across to Dunnagoat Cottage. Us'll go back that way and I'll give 'e a drink."

Friend washed his hands in a pool. Then he returned to the works, extinguished his lamp and fire, locked the outer door of the great chambers, and set off southward beside Brendon.

He learnt the newcomer's name, remarked on his size, and then returned to peat. But Daniel was weary of the subject and strove to change it.

"You'm lonely up here, I reckon, an' not another house for miles," he said.

"I keep up here and bide honest," answered Friend. "If you go down-along among the rogues, your honesty wears away, an' you never know it have gone, till somebody stands up to your face and tells you so. I've seen young men slide from it without ever meaning to. As to being lonely, I've got my darter and my work. I go to Lydford once a week for letters. But a town drives me mad—all the noise and business and silly talk."

They tramped over coarse fen, spattered with ling and the ragged white tufts of the cotton grass. Upon the waste shone cheerful light, where the blades of rough moor herbage began to perish from their tips and burn orange-red. Through the midst ran a pathway on which the gravel of granite glittered. Pools extended round about, and beneath them the infant Rattle-brook, newcome from her cradle under Hunter Tor, purred southward to Tavy.

The men followed this stream, and so approached a solitary grey cottage that stood nakedly in the very heart of the wilderness. Stark space surrounded it. At first sight it looked no more than a boulder, larger than common, that had been hurled hither from the neighbouring hill at some seismic convulsion of olden days. But, unlike the stones around it, this lump of lifted granite was hollow, had windows pierced in its lowly chambers, and a hearth upon its floor. It seemed a thing lifted by some sleight of power unknown, for it rose here utterly unexpected and, as it appeared, without purpose. No trace was left of the means by which it came. Not a wall, not a bank or alignment encircled it; no enclosure of any kind approached it; no outer rampart fenced it from the desolation. Heather-clad ridges of peat ran to the very threshold; rough natural clitters of rock tumbled to its walls; door and windows opened upon primal chaos, rolling and rising, sinking and falling in leagues on every side. Heavy morasses stretched to north and east; westward rose Dunnagoat Tor, that gave

TAVY CLEEVE.

[To face p. 22.

a name to the cot, and past the entrance Rattle-brook rippled noisily. Away, whence morning came, the great hogged back of Cut Hill swelled skyward, and the towers and battlements of Fur Tor arose; while southerly, brown, featureless, interminable undulations drifted along the horizon and faded upon air, or climbed to the far distant crags and precipices of Great Mis.

The door of Gregory Friend's home faced west; and now it framed a woman.

CHAPTER IV

SYMPATHY

Sarah Jane Friend's eyes opened wide to see so mighty a stranger approaching with her father. But he was of their own class, for his raiment proclaimed him. Therefore the woman left the doorstep and walked a little way to meet them.

Of purest Saxon type was she. One might have guessed that some strain of blood from the Heptarchy had been handed onward through the centuries, unalloyed with any Celtic or Norman addition. So did not the aboriginal Danmonii look; for the women who herded in the old granite lodges aforetime and logged the stoneman's babies in a wolf-skin were swarthy and small. Sarah Jane stood five feet ten, and was fair of face. Her hair shone of the palest gold that a woman's hair can be; her skin was white. Only the

summer suns and the wind from the ocean warmed it to clear redness. When winter came again and the light was low, her face grew pale once more. But pallid it was not. Health shone in her radiant blue eyes and on her lips. She revealed great riches of natural beauty, but they were displayed to no artificial advantage, and her generous breast and stately hips went uncontrolled. She was clad in a dirty print gown, over which, for apron, hung an old sack with "Amicombe Peat Works" stamped in faded black letters across it. Her sleeves were rolled up; her hair was wild about her nape.

Mr. Friend had found Daniel to his taste, for a steadfast listener always cheered him and made him amiable.

"This be Mr. Daniel Brendon," he said. "He'm working to Ruddyford, and comes up with a message. Give us a drink o' cider."

Sarah nodded, cast a swift glance at the labourer, and returned to her house.

"Won't come in—I be in such a muck o' dirt," declared Dan; but the other insisted.

"Peat ban't dirt," he said. "'Tis sweet, wholesome stuff, an' good anywhere."

They sat at a deal table presently, and Gregory's daughter brought two large stone-ware mugs decorated with black trees on a blue ground. She poured out their cider and spoke to the visitor.

"How do 'e like it down-along then, mister?"

"Very nice, thank you kindly," he answered, looking into her eyes and wondering at the colour of them.

"John Prout's a good old chap," she said.

"So he is, then. Never met a better."

"How his sister can keep all you men in order I don't know, I'm sure."

"She's a very patient creature. Here's luck, Mr. Friend."

He turned to the peat-master and lifted his mug. Gregory thanked him.

"You'm an understanding chap, seemingly; though they'm rare in the rising generation. What's your work to Ruddyford?"

Dan's face fell.

"To be plain with you, not all I could wish. Master 'pears to think a man of my inches can't be no good in the head. He puts nought but heavy work upon me—not that I mind that, for I can do what it takes two others to do—to say it without boasting, being built so. But I'm an understanding man, as you be good enough to allow, and I'd hoped that he'd have seen it, too, and let me have authority here an' there."

"Of course," said Sarah Jane. "If you can do two men's work, you ought to have the ordering of people."

"But a big arm be nought nowadays, along o' steam power," he explained. "I haven't a word against Tapson, or Agg, or yet Lethbridge: they'm very good fellows all. But, if I may say so without being thought ill of, they'm simple men, and want a better man to watch 'em. Now such as they would bide here, for instance, and talk the minute-hand round the clock—from no badness in them, but just empty minds."

He rose and prepared to go.

"Your parts will come to be knowed, if you're skilled in 'em and bide your time," said Mr. Friend; "though if you balance patience against the shortness of life, 'tis often a question whether some among us don't push patience too far. I've been patient too long for one; but that's because I can't be nothing else. I've told 'em the great truth—God knows. But ban't my part to lead. I must obey. Yet, knowing what I know about Amicombe Hill, 'tis hard to wait. Sometimes I think the Promised Land ban't for me at all."

"I should hope the Promised Land was for all of us," ventured Daniel.

"*That* Land—yes. I mean yonder hill, bursting with fatness."

He waved up the valley in the direction of the peat works.

They came to the door and Sarah spoke again.

"I should think Mr. Woodrow wouldn't stand in your way. He rode up to see father last year, and was a very kindly man, though rather sorrowful-looking."

"He is a kindly man," said Brendon, "and a good master, which we all allow. But he'm only half alive, so to say. At least, the other half of him be hidden from us. He'm not one of us, along of his education. A great reader of books and a great secret thinker."

"I'm sure he'll come to know your vartues, if he's such a clever man as all that," said Sarah Jane frankly.

The compliment took Daniel's breath away. He laughed foolishly.

"'Tis terrible kind of you to say so, and I thank you very much for them words," he answered.

The father eyed them, and saw Mr. Brendon's neck and cheeks grow red. The young men often revealed these phenomena before his daughter's good wishes. She was amiable and generous-hearted. Her exceedingly sequestered life might have made some women shy; but to her it lent a candour and unconventional singleness of mind, that rendered more sophisticated spirits uneasy. The doors of her nature were thrown open; she almost thought aloud. Numerous suitors courted her in consequence, and a clown or two had erred before Sarah Jane, because they imagined that her good-natured interest in their affairs must be significant and special. Brendon, however, was not the man to make any such mistake. He departed, impressed and flattered at her sympathy; yet his mind did not dwell upon that. He sought rather to think a picture of her young face, and strove to find a just simile for her hair. He decided that it was the colour of kerning corn, when first the green fades and the milky grain begins to feel the kiss of summer.

A man cried to him before he had gone more than a

hundred yards from Dunnagoat Cottage, and, rather gladly, he retraced his steps. But Sarah Jane had disappeared, and Mr. Friend was alone. Gregory advanced to meet him as he returned.

"I like you," said the elder. "You'm serious-minded and might wish to hear more about the truth of peat. What do you do of a Sunday?"

"I go to church mornings; then there's a few odd bits o' work; but I've nought between three o'clock and supper."

"Next Sunday, if the day's fine, I'm going over to Wattern Oke."

"I know the hill."

"You can meet me an' my darter there an' have a tell, if you mind to."

"I'm sure nothing would please me better, Mr. Friend—'tis a very great act of kindness to propose it."

Gregory nodded and said no more, while Brendon, gratified by the invitation, went his way.

He had no thought for the immensity of the earth vision now rolling under his feet. His eye turned inward to regard impressions recently registered by memory. Friend's strange, peat-smeared face, his shining beard, and wild eyes; Sarah Jane's neck and shoulders and straight back; her hands that held the cider-jug; her voice, so kindly—these things quite filled the man's slow brain.

Of a devout intensity under religious influence, Brendon's strenuous nature developed less favourably beneath pressure of mundane affairs. He could be passionate and he could be harsh. He found it uncommonly difficult to forgive injury, and sometimes sulked before imaginary injustice. He was somewhat sensitive and given to brooding. He knew his own good qualities, but while too modest to push them, felt secret sense of wrong when others failed to discover them swiftly. Like all men, he delighted to be taken at his own valuation; but though his humility would not publish that valuation, yet, when his cause was not advanced, he resented it and made a grievance of neglect.

It was early at present to predict his future at Ruddyford. The place proceeded automatically. Nobody was ambitious of power, or of work; each did his toll of toil, and all were friends. Nominally Mr. Prout ruled; in reality the little commonwealth had no head under the master. In time of rare disputes John Prout laid down the law and none questioned him. Few difficulties arose, for Woodrow paid well and kept the farm in a state of culture unusually high. A very rare standard of comfort prevailed, and neighbours always held that Hilary Woodrow was rather an amateur, or gentleman-farmer, than one who lived by his labours and worked for bread. But none could say of him that he neglected his business. He knew the possibilities of Ruddyford, spent only upon the land what it was worth, and devoted the greater part of his money and care to raising of sheep and cattle.

Brendon strode down the great side of Hare Tor, then suddenly perceiving that he was walking out of his way, turned right-handed. The wind blew up rain roughly from the south, and separate cloud-banks slunk along the hills, as though they hastened to some place of secret meeting. Daniel passed down among them, and was within a hundred yards of the farm, when Prout, on a grey pony, met him.

"You've seed Friend and told him about the peat?" he asked.

"Ess; 'twill be ready—'tis ready now, for that matter."

"A curious human be Greg Friend," commented Mr. Prout. "Peat! Why, he's made of peat—body and bones—just the same as me an' you be made of earth. He thinks peat, and dreams peat, and talks peat—the wonder is he don't eat peat!"

John Prout lived alone in a cottage thirty yards from the main building of Ruddyford. It contained four rooms, of which he only occupied two. Now and again Tabitha insisted upon tidying up for him, but he dreaded her visitations, and avoided them as much as possible.

Brendon stopped at his door, and John spoke again before he alighted.

"Not but what Friend isn't a very good sort of man. The peat's a bee in his bonnet, yet never an honester or straighter chap walked among us. He looks to Amicombe Hill to make everybody's fortune presently."

"He calls it the Promised Land," said Daniel.

"He do—poor fellow! He's out there. It don't promise nothing and won't yield nothing. They bogs have swallowed a long sight more solid money than anybody will ever dig up out of 'em again; and 'twould be well for Greg's peace of mind if he could see it; but he won't. He goes messing about with his bottles and bellows, and gets gas and tar out of the stuff, and makes such a fuss, as though he'd found diamonds; but 'tis all one. Peat's good, but coal's better, and God A'mighty meant it to be. You can't turn peat into coal, or hurry up nature. She won't be hurried, and there's an end of it."

"He've got a fine darter, seemingly."

Mr. Prout laughed.

"Ah! you met her—eh? Yes, she's a proper maiden—a regular wonder in her way—so open, and clear-minded as a bird. Never yet heard a girl speak so frank—'tis like a child more than what you'd expect from a grown-up woman. But ban't she lovely in her Sunday frill-de-dills! I was up over last spring, and drinked a dish of tea with 'em. Lucky the chap as gets her—bachelor though I am, I say it."

"Be she tokened?"

"A good few's after her, I believe; but there's only one in the running. I mean Jarratt Weekes to Lydford—the castle keeper there."

"I know the man—why, he's old!"

"Doan't you say that. 'Tis hard thing for my ears to hear. If he's old at forty, what be I at sixty-five? I won't let nobody say I'm old, Daniel!"

"Old for her, I mean. There must be best part of twenty year between 'em."

"It often works very well an' keeps down the family."

"Can't fancy her along with that man."

"She won't ax your leave, my son. But her father's rather of your mind, I fancy. Gregory never did like Jarratt Weekes—nor any of the Weekes breed, for that matter. Jarratt was spoiled as a child. He'm the only son of his parents, and more hard than soft—just as you would expect the child of Hepsy Weekes to be. She's stamped herself upon him."

"Us'll be late for dinner if us talk any more; though what you tell me is very interesting," answered Brendon.

CHAPTER V

THE KEEPER OF THE CASTLE

The former glories of Lydford have long since vanished away; yet once it was among the most ancient of Devon boroughs, and stood only second to Exeter in credit and renown. Before the Norman Conquest Lydford flourished as a fortified town; when, "for largeness in lands and liberties" no western centre of civilization might compare with it. But hither came the bloody Danes by way of Tavistock, to consume with fire and sword, and raze this Saxon stronghold to the ground. From these blows the borough recovered, and upon the ruins of the settlement arose a mediæval town wherein, for certain centuries, there reigned a measure of prosperity. The late Norman castle belonged to the twelfth century. It was a true "keep" and a stout border fortress. Within its walls were held the

LYDFORD CASTLE.

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Courts, beneath its floors were hidden the dungeon, of the Stannaries. From the Commonwealth until two hundred years ago, the castle lay in ruins; then a partial restoration overtook it; Manor and Borough Courts were held there; prisoners again languished within its walls. But when Prince Town rose, at the heart of Dartmoor's central wastes, all seats of local authority were moved thither; Lydford Castle fell back into final neglect, and the story of many centuries was ended.

To-day this survival of ancient pride and power lies gaunt, ruined, hideous, and, in unvenerable age, still squats and scowls four-square to all the winds that blow. From its ugly window-holes to its tattered crown there is no beautiful thing about it, save the tapestry of nature that sucks life from its bones and helps to hide them. Grass and ferns, hawkweed, sweet yarrow, toadflax, and fragrant wormwood thrive within its rents and crevices; seedling ash and elder find foothold in the deep embrasures; ivy mantles the masonry and conceals its meanness. The place sulks, like an untamable and unlovely beast dying. It reflects to the imagination the dolours and agonies of forlorn wretches—innocent and guilty—who have pined and perished within its dungeons. Now these subterranean dens, stripped to the light, are crumbling between the thumb and forefinger of Time; their gloomy corners glimmer green with moss and tongues of fern and moisture oozing; briars drape the walls from which hung staples; wood strawberries, like rubies, glitter among the riven stones. Windows and a door still gape in the thickness of the walls; and above, where once were floors, low entrances open upon air. In the midst extends a square of grass; aloft, a spectator may climb to the decayed stump of the ruin, and survey Lydford's present humility; her church, dwarfed largely by the bulk of the castle; her single row of little dwellings; the dimpled land of orchards and meadows round about her; and the wide amphitheatre of Dartmoor towering semi-circular to the East.

Fifty years ago, as now, the village straggled away from the feet of the castle under roofs of grey thatch and tar-pitched slate. Many of the cottages had little gardens before them, and one dwelling, larger than the rest, stood with a bright, rosy-washed face, low windows and low brow of grey thatch, behind luxuriance of autumn flowers. To the door of it there led a blue slate path, and on either side smiled red phloxes, bell-flowers, tiger-lilies with scarlet, black-spattered chalices, and pansies of many shades. A little golden yew, clipped into a pyramid, stood on one side of the door; upon the other sat a man peeling potatoes.

Philip Weekes was short and square and round in the back. His black beard, cut close to the chin, began to turn white; his hair was also grizzled. His cheeks were red and round; his large grey eyes had a wistful expression, as of eyes that ached with hope of a sight long delayed. His voice, but seldom heard, was mournful in its cadence. Now Mr. Weekes dropped his last potato into a pail of water; then he picked up the pail, and a second, that contained the peelings. With these he went to the rear of his house. It was necessary to go out through the front gate, and as he did so a friend stopped him.

"Nice weather, schoolmaster," he said in his mild tones.

"Very seasonable indeed. And I observe your son up at the ruin with a party every time I pass. He must be doing well, Mr. Weekes."

"Nothing to complain about, I believe; but Jarratt—to say it friendly—is terrible close. I don't know what he's worth, Mr. Churchward."

"I expect your good lady does, however."

The father nodded.

"Very likely. I ban't in all their councils."

The schoolmaster—a tall, stout man, with a pedagogic manner and some reputation for knowledge—made no comment upon this speech, but discreetly pursued his way. He stopped at the Castle Inn, however, for the half-pint of ale he always allowed himself after morning school.

The little public-house stood almost under the castle walls; and beyond it rose a bower of ancient trees, through which appeared the crocketed turrets of St. Petrock's. Adam Churchward was a widower and enjoyed high esteem at Lydford. People thought more of him than the vicar, because though of lesser learning, he displayed it to better advantage and denied himself to none. He was self-conscious under his large and heavy manner, but he concealed the fact, and nobody knew the uneasiness that often sat behind his white shirt-front and black tie, when accident threatened the foundations of his fame.

As he emptied potato peelings into a barrel, there came to the master of this flowery garden a wild and untidy brown maid, easily to be recognized as the runaway Susan.

"Pleace, Uncle Phil, aunt says if you've done them 'taters she'd like 'em to see the fire, if us be going to have dinner come presently."

"They'm done," he said. "I be bringing of 'em."

A voice like a guinea-hen's came through the open door.

"Now, master, if you've finished looking at the sky, I'll thank you to fetch a dollop o' peat. An' be them fowls killed yet? You know what Mrs. Swain said last Saturday? 'Yours be the bestest fowls as ever come into Plymouth Market, Hephzibah,' she said. 'I'd go miles for such poultry; an' you sell 'em too cheap most times; but if your husband would only kill 'em a thought sooner, to improve their softness——' 'He shall do it, ma'am,' I said; but well I knowed all the time I might so soon speak to a pig in his sty as you—such a lazy rogue you be."

"I'll kill 'em after dinner—plenty of time."

"'Plenty of time'! Always your wicked, loafing way. Put off—put off—where's that gal? Go an' sweep the best bedroom, Susan. 'Plenty of time.' You'll come to eternity presently—with nothing to show for it. Then, when they ax what you've been doing with your time, you'll cut a pretty cheap figure, Philip Weekes."

Her husband exhibited a startling indifference to this

attack; but it was the indifference that an artilleryman displays to the roar and thunder of ordnance. His wife talked all day long—often half the night also; and her language was invariably hyperbolic and sensational. Nobody ever took her tragic diction seriously, least of all her husband. His position in the home circle was long since defined. He did a great deal of women's work, suffered immense indignities with philosophic indifference, and brightened into some semblance of content and satisfaction once a week. This was upon Saturday nights, when his partner invariably slept at Plymouth. Her husband and she were hucksters; but since, among its other disabilities, Lydford was denied the comfort of a market, they had to seek farther for customers, and it was to Plymouth that they took their produce.

Every Friday Mr. Weekes harnessed his pony and drove a little cart from Lydford into Bridgetstowe, through certain hamlets. He paid a succession of visits, and collected from the folk good store of eggs, butter, rabbits, ducks, honey, apples and other fruit, according to the season. His own contributions to the store were poultry and cream. He had one cow, and kept a strain of large Indian game fowls which were noted amongst the customers of Mrs. Weekes. On Saturday the market woman was driven to Lydford Station with her stores, and after a busy day in Plymouth, she slept with a married niece there, and returned to her home again on the following morning.

This programme had continued for nearly forty years. On rare occasions Philip Weekes himself went to market; but, as his wife declared, "master was not a good salesman," and she never let him take her place at the stall if she could help it.

Hephzibah was a little, lean woman, with white, wild locks sticking out round her head, like a silver aureole that had been drawn through a bramble-bush. She had bright pink cheeks, a long upper lip, a hard mouth with very few teeth left therein, and eyes that feared nothing and dropped before nothing. She was proud of herself and her house.

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[*To face p.* 84.

She had a mania for sweeping her carpets; and if at any moment Susan was discovered at rest, her aunt instantly despatched her to the broom. After a good market Hephzibah was busier than ever, and drove her niece and her husband hither and thither before her, like leaves in a gale of wind; if the market had been bad, the strain became terrific, and Susan generally found it necessary to run away. Mr. Weekes could not thus escape; but he bowed under the tempest, anticipated his wife's commands to the best of his power, and contrived to be much in the company of his Indian game fowls. After each week of tragical clacking and frantic sweeping Saturday came, and the peace of the grave descended upon Mr. Weekes. During Saturday he would not even suffer Susan to open her mouth.

"'Pon Saturdays give me silence," he said. "The ear wants rest, like any other member."

While his wife's shrill tongue echoed about her corner of the market-place and lured customers from far, he sat at home in a profound reverie and soaked in silence. By eventide he felt greatly refreshed, and generally spent an hour or two at the Castle Inn—a practice forbidden to him on other days.

"Go," said Mrs. Weekes; "go this instant moment, afore dinner, an' kill the properest brace you can catch. If you won't work, you shan't eat, and that's common-sense and Bible both. Mrs. Swain said——"

Her husband nodded, felt that his penknife was in his pocket, and went out. The poultry-run stood close at hand at the top of Philip's solitary field. Sacks were nailed along the bottom of the gate, to keep safe the chicks, and a large fowl-house filled one corner. As the master entered, a hundred handsome birds, with shining plumage of cinnamon and ebony, ran and swooped round him in hope. But he had brought death, not dinner. A gallows stood in a corner, and soon two fine fowls hung from it by their long yellow legs and fulfilled destiny. Then Mr. Weekes girt an apron about him, took the corpses into a shed, spread a cloth for

the feathers, sat down upon a milking-stool and began to pluck them.

Meantime the other occupant of his home had returned to dinner. Jarratt Weekes, the huckster's son, came back from his morning's work at the castle and called to his mother to hasten the meal.

"There's quite a lot of people about to-day," he said, "and a party of a dozen be coming up at three o'clock to look over the ruin."

"Then you must make hay while the sun shines," declared Mrs. Weekes.

Hephzibah's only child had now reached the age of forty, and the understanding between them was very close and intimate. Reticent to all else, he found his mother so much of his own way of thinking, that from her he had no secrets. She admired his thrift, and held his penuriousness a virtue. Despite her garrulity, Mrs. Weekes could keep close counsel where it suited her to do so; and neither her son's affairs nor her own ever made matter for speech. They enjoyed an inner compact from which even the head of the house was excluded. Jarratt Weekes despised his father, and failed to note the older man's virtues. The castle-keeper himself could boast a personable exterior; but he was mean, and his countenance, though not unhandsome, betrayed it. He loved money for itself, and had saved ever since he was a boy. His clean-shorn, strongly featured face was spoiled by the eyes. They were bright and very keen, but too close together. He looked all his years by reason of a system of netted lines that were stamped over his forehead, upon his cheeks and round the corners of his lips. He lent money, ran sheep upon Dartmoor, and was busy in many small ways that helped his pocket. He paid his mother five shillings a week for board and lodging; and she tried almost every day of her life to make him give seven-and-six, yet secretly admired him for refusing to do so. He was of medium height, and in figure not unlike his father, but still straight in the back and of upright bearing

Jarratt sat down at the kitchen table, while his mother made ready a meal for him. The room was empty, and overhead sounded the regular stroke of Susan's broom.

"Glad you're alone," he said, "for I wanted to talk a moment. I saw Sarah Jane to Bridgetstowe yesterday. She'd come down with a message from her father. Sunday week she's going to take her dinner with us. Then I shall ax her."

Mrs. Weekes nodded, and for a moment her tongue was silent. She looked at her son, and a shadow of something akin to emotion swept over her high-coloured cheeks and bold eyes.

"What a change 'twill be! I suppose you'll take the house to the corner? Mrs. Routleigh can't hold out over Christmas."

"Yes, I shall take it. But there's Sarah Jane to be managed first."

"Not much trouble there. She ban't a fool. She'll jump at you."

"You're not often wrong; but I'm doubtful. Sarah's not like other girls. She don't care for comfort and luxury."

"Give her the chance! She's young yet. They all like comfort, and they all want a husband. Quite right too."

"She can have her pick of twenty husbands—such a rare piece as her."

"Them pretty ones all think that; an' they often come to grief over it. They put off choosing year after year till suddenly they find 'emselves wrong side of thirty, and the flat chits, that was childern yesterday, grown up into wife-old maidens. Then they run about after the men they used to despise. But the men be looking for something younger by that time. You men—the years betwixt thirty to forty don't hit you; and what you lose in juice an' comeliness, you make up at the bank. But ban't so with us. There's no interest on good looks—all the other way. These things

I've told Sarah Jane myself; so be sure she knows 'em. You'm a thought old for her: that's my only fear."

"Would you go at it like a bull at a gate, or wind round it? She knows well enough what I feel. Why, I gived her a brooch that cost five shillings and sixpence come her last birthday."

"Dash at her! She's the sort that must be stormed. Don't dwell over-much on the advantages, because she's too young to prize 'em. Catch fire an' blaze like a young 'un. They like it best that way. Don't take 'no' for an answer. 'Twas a dash that caught me; though you'd never think it to see your father now-a-days."

He listened respectfully.

"I'm not the dashing sort, however."

"No, you ban't. Still, that's the best way with she. Many a woman's been surprised into saying 'yes.' Do anything but write it. Sarah Jane wouldn't stand writing. For that matter, 'tis a question if she can read penmanship. An ignorant girl along of her bringing up."

"Good at figures, however; for Gregory Friend told me so."

"What does he know about figures? Still, 'tis very much in her favour if true."

Mrs. Weekes now went to the window and looked out of it. Down the street stood an ivy-covered cottage where two ways met. Beside it men were working in the road.

"The water-leat will run through your back orchard, won't it?"

"Yes; I'd counted upon that. The new leat goes from one side to t'other. 'Twill be a great source of strength and improve the value of the property."

"The sooner you buy the better then—afore Widow Routleigh understands—eh?"

He hesitated a moment, then confessed.

"I have bought," he said.

"Well done you! Why didn't you tell me?"

"I was going to. But keep silent as the pit about it.

Only me, an' her, and her lawyer knows. As a matter of fact, I bought before the leat got near the place. I knowed 'twas coming; they never thought of it."

"You'm a wonder!"

She looked at the house destined for her son and his bride.

"You won't be far off—that's to the good. You an' me must always be close cronies, Jar. Who else have I got?"

"No fear of that."

She went to the oven, put a stew upon the table, and lifted her voice to the accustomed penetrating note.

"Dinner! Dinner! Come, master! Us can't bide about all afternoon for you. Susan, get down house, will 'e, an' let me see the dustpan. I know what your sweeping be like—only too well."

Mr. Weekes received a volume of reproaches as he entered five minutes later, and took his place at the head of the table.

"I've been plucking fowls, an' had to wash," he said.

"Then I hope to God you chose the right ones. Mrs. Swain *will* have 'em the same size to a hair. If they come to table a thought uneven, her pleasure's spoilt. And the best customer I've got in the Three Towns. But what do you care . . . ? Susan, you dirty imp, can't you . . . Tchut! If your parents don't turn in their graves, it ban't no fault of yours . . . !"

So she played chorus to the banquet. How Mrs. Weekes ever found time to eat none knew.

CHAPTER VI

WATTERN OKE

When Daniel Brendon stepped out of the world into church, a change came upon his spirit, and he had the power of absorbing himself in religious fervour. He lived under the permanent sense of a divine presence, and when life prospered with him and nothing hurt or angered him, the labourer's mind was cheered by the companionship of his Maker. Only if overtaken by a dark mood, or conscious of wrong-doing, did he feel solitary. The experience was rare, yet he faced it without self-delusion, and assured himself that when God forsook his heart, the fault was his own.

In a temper amiable and at peace he kept the Sunday appointment with Gregory Friend. During morning worship he had heard a sermon that comforted his disquiet, and served for a time to mask from his sight the ambitions proper to his nature. He had been told to do with his might the thing that his hand found to do; he had been warned against casting his desires in too large a mould; he had heard of the dignity of patience.

Brendon's mind was therefore contented, and as he strode through the evening of the year's work and marked the sun turn westward over a mighty pageant of autumn, he felt resignation brooding within him. Nature, for once, chimed with the things of his soul and blazoned a commentary upon the cherished dogmas of his faith.

He stood where the little Rattle leapt to Tavy, flung a last loop of light, and, laughing to the end of her short life, poured her crystal into a greater sister's bosom. Sinuously, by many falls, they glided together under the crags and battlements of the Cleeve; and the September sun beat straight into that nest of rivers, to touch each lesser rill

that threaded glittering downward and hung like a silver rope over shelf of stone, or in some channel cut by ancient floods. Their ways were marked by verdure; by sphagnum, in sheets of emerald or rose, orange or palest lemon; by dark rushes, stiffly springing, and by the happiness of secret flowers. Heath and grey granite shone together; a smooth, green coomb stretched beside water's meet, but beyond it all was confusion of steep hills and stony precipices. Over their bosoms the breath of autumn hung in misty fire, while strange, poised boulders crouched upon them threateningly and sparkled in the sun. Haze of blue brake-fern shimmered here and burnt at points to sudden gold, where death had already touched it. Light streamed down, mingling with the air, until all things were transfigured and the darkest shadows abounded in warm tones. The ling still shone, and its familiar, fleeting mantle of pale amethyst answered the brilliance of the sky with radiant flower-light that refreshed the jewels of the late furze by splendour of contrast. The unclouded firmament lent its proper glory to this vale. Even under the sun's throne air was made visible, and hung like a transparent curtain over the world—a curtain less than cloud and more than clarity. It obscured nothing, yet informed the great hills and distant, sunk horizon with its own azure magic; it transfused the far-off undulations of the earth, and so wrought upon leagues of sun-warmed ether that they washed away material details and particulars. There remained only huge generality of light aloft, and delicate, vague delineation of opal and of pearl in the valleys beneath.

The rivers, spattered with rocks and wholly unshadowed, ran together in a skein of molten gold. Behind the murmuring hills they vanished westerly; and though these waters gleamed with the highest light under the sky, yet even in the dazzling force of sheer sunshine, flung direct upon their liquid mirrors, were degrees of brilliance—from the pure and steady sheen of pools, through splendour of broken waters, up to blinding flashes of foam, where the

sun met a million simultaneous bubbles and stamped the tiny, blazing image of himself upon each.

Sunshine indeed poured out upon all created things. It lighted the majesty of the hills and flamed above each granite tower and heather ridge; it brightened the coats of the wandering herds and shone upon little rough calves and foals that crept beside their mothers; it touched the solitary heron's pinion, as he flapped heavily to his haunt; and forgot not the wonder of vanessa's wings, nor the snake on the stone, nor the lizard in the herbage. Each diurnal life was glorified by the splendour of day; and when there fell presently a cloud-shadow, like a bridge across the Cleeve, it heightened the surrounding brilliance and, passing, made the light more admirable. Upward, like the music from a golden shell, came Tavy's immemorial song; and it echoed most musical on the ear of him who, crowning this vision with conscious intelligence, could dimly apprehend some part of what he saw.

Daniel seated himself on rocks overlooking the Cleeve. His massive body felt the sun's heat strike through it; and now he stared unblinking upward, and now scanned the glen upon his right. That way, round, featureless hills climbed one behind the other, until they rose to a distant gap upon the northern horizon where stood Dunnagoat cot against the sky. Low tors broke out of the hills about it, and upon their summits, like graven images, the cattle stood in motionless groups, according to their wont on days of great heat.

Brendon rose presently, stretched himself, and, seen far off, appeared to be saluting the sun. Then he turned to the hills and passed a little way along them. His eye had marked two specks, a mile distant, and as they approached they grew into a man and woman.

Gregory Friend, with his daughter, met Daniel beside a green barrow. He shook hands and remarked on the splendour of the hour. The peat-man had put off his enthusiasm with his working clothes. He wore black and

DUNNAGOAT COT. [*To face p.* 42.

appeared somewhat bored and listless, for the week-days only found him worshipping.

"He hates Sabbaths," explained Sarah. "To keep off his business be a great trouble to him; but he says as we must mark the day outwardly as well as inwardly. So he dons his black, an' twiddles his thumbs, an' looks up the valley to the works, but holds away from 'em."

She wore a crude blue dress that chimed with nothing in nature and fitted ill. Brendon, however, admired it exceedingly.

"'Tis very nice 'pon top of Wattern Oke, if you care to come so far," he said.

They returned to the place where Daniel had sat.

"I'll spread my coat for 'e, so as you shan't soil thicky lovely gown," he suggested to Sarah Jane.

"No call to do that, thank you. I'll sit 'pon this stone. I'm glad you like the dress. I put it on for you to see. My word, 'tis summer come back again to-day!"

The labourer was fluttered, but could think of nothing to say. Both men smoked their pipes, and Friend began to thrust his stick into the earth. They spoke of general subjects, then Daniel remembered a remark that the other had made upon their first meeting. He had no desire to hear more concerning peat; but his heart told him that the theme must at least give one of the party pleasure, and therefore he led to it. Moreover, he felt a strong desire to please Gregory, yet scarcely knew his reason.

"You was going to give me a little of your large knowledge 'bout Amicombe Hill, master," he said, after an interval of silence.

Mr. Friend's somewhat lethargic attitude instantly changed. He sat up briskly and his eyes brightened.

"So I was then; and so I will. To think that within eye-shot at this moment there's more'n enough fuel to fill every hearth in England! There's a masterpiece of a thought—eh? If people only realized that. . . . And Amicombe Hill peat be the very cream and marrow of it

all—the fatness of the land's up there—better than granite, or tin, or anything a man may delve in all Dartymoor."

"Not a doubt of it—not a doubt," said the listener; but Sarah Jane shook her head.

"Don't you encourage him, Mr. Brendon, or I'll not have you up the hill no more. Ban't six days a week enough for one subject? Can't us tell about something different Sundays?"

"Plenty of time," answered her father. "Peat's a high matter enough in my opinion. If us knowed all there is to know about it, us should see nearer into the ways of God in the earth, I'm sure. There's things concerning Amicombe peat no man has yet found out, and perhaps no man ever will."

"On week-days he lives up to his eyes in the peat, an' 'pon Sundays he preaches it," said Sarah. "That is when any man's silly enough to let him," she added pointedly.

Her father began to show a little annoyance at these interruptions.

"You'd best to go and walk about, an' leave me an' Brendon to talk," he said.

"So I will, then, my dear," she answered, laughing; "an' when you've done, one of you can stand up on a rock an' wave his handkercher; then I'll come back."

To Daniel's dismay, she rose and strolled off. Friend chattered eagerly; Sarah Jane's blue shape dwindled, and was presently lost to sight.

For half-an-hour the elder kept up a ceaseless discourse; but, since Daniel did nothing more than listen, and scarcely asked a question to help the matter, Gregory Friend began to tire. He stopped, then proceeded. He stopped again, yawned, and relighted his pipe.

"That's just the beginning about peat," he said. "But don't think you know nothing yet. My darter knows more than that—ignorant though she is."

"Not ignorant, I'm sure. But—well, shall I tell her

that, just for the present, we've done wi' peat, or would you rather——?"

Gregory felt that Brendon had fairly earned a respite and reward. Moreover, the sunshine was making him sleepy.

"Go an' look after her," he said. "An' come back to me presently. I'll have forty winks. Nought on earth makes me so dog-tired as laziness."

Daniel was gone in a moment, yet, as he strode whence the girl had disappeared, he found time to ask himself what this must mean. He had never looked round after a woman in his life. Women about a place made him uneasy, and acted as a restraint on comfort. He knew nothing whatever concerning them, and was quite content to believe the opinions of John Prout: that, upon the whole, a man might be better single. Yet this woman had interested him from the first moment that he saw her; he had thought of her not seldom since; he had anticipated another meeting with interest that was pleasure.

He crossed Wattern Oke, then looked down where Tavy winds beneath the stony side of Fur Tor. A bright blue spot appeared motionless at the brink of the river. Daniel, feeling surprise to think that she had wandered so far, hastened forward and, in a quarter of an hour, stood beside her. She smiled at him.

"I knowed you'd come for me," she said. "There was that in your face made me feel it. You was sorry when I went off?"

"So I was then."

"I rather wanted to see if you would be. It shows friendship. I like men to be friends with me. I often wish I'd been born a man myself—'stead of a woman. I'm such a big maiden, an' awful strong—not but what I look more than a fly beside you. You could pick me up in they gert arms, I reckon?"

"I suppose I could for that matter. I carried a pig yesterday—lifted un clean up an' got un on my back; but it took two other chaps to move it. 'Twas Agg and Tapson.

'Here, let me get to his carcase,' I said; an' I lifted it clear into the butcher's cart, while they two was wiping their foreheads!"

She nodded with evident approval.

Suddenly his slow mind worked backwards.

"All the same," he said, "I didn't ought to have mentioned your name in the same breath with a pig. 'Twas a hole in my manners, and I hope you'll overlook it."

Sarah Jane laughed.

"What a man! Where was you brought up to? Ban't many so civil in these parts."

"I was teached to be civil by my mother. But I know nought beyond my business—not like Mister Woodrow. He has grammer-school larning, an' London larning, and reads books that I can't understand a word about."

She told him of her own childhood, of her mother, of her few friends.

"Girls don't seem to like me," she said. "I hardly know above half-a-dozen of 'em. There's Minnie Taverner to Lydford, and Mary Churchward—nobody much else. Mary's brother's nearly as big as you be. But t'others I used to know, when I went to school, are all married or gone to service now."

"Very interesting," said Daniel. "I never had but one sister. She's down to Plymouth—a greengrocer's wife there."

They talked freely together, and presently rose and set out to rejoin Mr. Friend. Under their feet Daniel suddenly saw a piece of white ling, and stopped and picked it.

"May I make bold to ax you to take it?" he said. "'Tis an old saying that it brings fortune."

"Then I won't accept of it," she said. "Thank you all the same; but fortune's in the wind for me already; an' I don't want it very much. I'm happy enough where I be along with my father."

"Tell me about the fortune," he said, flinging the heath away.

Thereupon she reminded him that, despite her masculine aspirations and amazing frankness, she was a woman after all.

Her eyes fell, then rose to his face again. A glorious, gentle, gentian blue they were.

"You want to know such a lot, Mr. Brendon," she said.

He was crushed instantly, and poured forth a string of apologies.

"You all do it," she answered. "I don't know what there is about me; but you chaps get so friendly—I feel as if I'd got about fifty brothers among you. But there's things you can't tell even brothers, you know."

"I'm terrible sorry. Just like my impudence to go pushing forward so. I deserve a clip on the side o' the head—same as my mother used to box my ears when I was a little one, an' hungry to ax too many questions."

Mr. Friend was awake and ready to walk homeward. Daniel accepted an invitation to tea, and accompanied them.

They ascended slowly by the steep channels of the Rattlebrook, and presently Gregory rested awhile.

"I can't travel same as once I could," he explained. Then he moralized.

"The world's an up an' down sort of place, like this here fen," he said. "Some holds the good and evil be balanced to a hair, so that every man have his proper share of each; but for my part I can't think it."

"The balance be struck hereafter. That trust a man must cling to—or else he'll get no happiness out of living," answered Daniel; and the other nodded.

"'Tis the only thought as can breed content in the mind; yet for the thousands that profess to believe it, you'll not find tens who really do so."

"I'm sure I do," asserted Brendon.

"At your time of life 'tis easy enough. But wait till you'm threescore and over. Then the spirit gets impatient, and it takes a very large pattern of faith to set such store

on the next world that failure in this one don't sting. If I am took from yonder peat works afore their fame be established to the nation, I shall go reluctant, and I own it. There'll be nought so interesting in Heaven—from my point of view—as Amicombe Hill."

"You'll have something better to think of and better to do, master."

"Maybe I shall; but my mind will turn that way, and I shall think it terrible hard if all knowledge touching the future of the place be withholden from me."

"We shall know so much of things down here as be good for our peace of mind, I reckon?" ventured Daniel.

"'Twould be wisht to have all blank," declared Sarah Jane. "Take the mothers an' wives. What's the joy of heaven to them if they don't know things is going well with their children an' husbands?"

"'Tis almost too high a subject for common people, though I could wish for light upon it myself," said her father.

"Of course they know!" cried the woman. "Don't you believe as mother holds us in her thoughts and watches our goings? Such a worrying spirit as hers! Heaven wouldn't be no better than a foreign country, where she couldn't get letters, if you an' me was hidden from her."

Daniel felt uneasy.

"Knowing what she knows now, she would be content to leave it with God," he said.

"Not her!" answered Sarah Jane. "A very suspicious nature, where those she loved was concerned."

"True. My wife could believe nought but her own eyes. She was built so. That's why she never would share my great opinions of Amicombe Hill. A very damping woman to a hopeful heart. A great trust in arithmetic she had; but for my part nought chills me like black figures on white paper. You can't draw much comfort from 'em most times."

"I'm like her," said Sarah Jane. "All for saying what I think. Father here's a dreamer."

"Hope's very good to work on, however; I hold with Mr. Friend there."

"Not so good as wages," said Sarah Jane.

"Sometimes in my uplifted moments I've wondered whether truth's made known to my wife now, and whether, looking down 'pon Dartymoor, she knows that I was right touching Amicombe Hill, and she was wrong," mused Gregory.

"Perhaps she knows she was right and you are wrong, my old dear," suggested Sarah Jane.

But her father shook his head.

"I ban't feared of that," he answered.

After a cup of tea, Daniel Brendon made a faltering proposal, and met with a startling reply.

"I wonder now, if you and Miss here would take a walk along o' me next Sunday?" he asked. "I'll meet 'e where you please. And I'm sure I should be terrible proud if you could lend me your company."

"I can't—not next Sunday," declared the girl. "'Tis like this: I'm going to Lydford to spend the day along with the Weekes family. And Jarratt Weekes be going to ax me to marry him."

Dan's eyes grew round.

"Good Lord!" he said, with surprise and reverence mingled.

"That's what the man's going to do, if I know him. 'Tis all planned out in his mind. I could most tell the words he'm going to say it in—knowing him so well as I do."

A natural question leapt to Brendon's lips, but he restrained it. He wanted to ask, "And shall you take him?" but resisted the burning temptation. This news, however, was a source of very active disquiet. He drank his tea, and was glad when Gregory Friend broke the silence.

"And you'll do well to think twice afore you say 'yes,'

Sarah Jane. A successful and a church-going man. A good son, I believe, and honest—as honesty goes in towns. But——"

"I'd never get a husband if I waited for you to find one, faither."

"Perhaps not. Good husbands are just as rare as good wives."

"Then—then perhaps Sunday after——?" persisted Brendon, whose mind had not wandered far from the main proposition.

"Perhaps," answered Sarah Jane. "You'm burning to hear tell what I shall say to the castle-keeper—ban't 'e now?"

"Who wouldn't be—such a fateful thing! But I know my manners better than to ax, I hope."

"I don't know what I'm going to say," declared she. "D'you know Jarratt Weekes?"

"No, I don't."

"Does anybody to Ruddyford?"

"Most of 'em know him."

"What do they say about him?"

Brendon hesitated.

"Can't answer that: wouldn't be fair to the man."

"You have answered it!" she said, and laughed.

A moment later he took his leave and strode slowly over the hills. So absorbed was he, that he did not watch his way, and presently tripped and fell. The accident cleared his mind.

"This be a new thing in me," he thought. "That blessed, lovely she's bewitched me, if I know myself! She'll take the man, no doubt. And yet—why? Such a face as that might look as high as a farmer at the lowest."

CHAPTER VII

PLAIN SPEAKING

A PEACE of unusual duration brooded over the dwelling of Philip Weekes; for his wife had gone to market on Saturday morning, but instead of returning home, according to her custom, in time for Sunday dinner at Lydford, she continued at Plymouth until the evening.

He basked in silence like a cat in the sun; but a few friends were coming to drink tea, and Susan already made preparations for the event.

Elsewhere, Sarah Jane, who was spending the day at Lydford, sat in a secret place with Jarratt Weekes and heard the things that she expected to hear.

The old castle was not opened to visitors on Sunday, but Jarratt kept the keys, and, after dinner, took Sarah to his fortress and offered her marriage within its mediæval walls. She wore her blue dress; he held himself a grade above those men who habitually don black upon the seventh day, and was attired in a mustard-coloured tweed suit.

"We'll come aloft," he said. "There's a window opens to the west, and I've put a seat there for visitors to sit in and look around. 'Tis out of sight of the street, and will shield you from the east wind that's blowing."

He offered to assist her up the wooden stairway, but she made as though she did not see and followed him easily.

Presently they sat together, and he sighed and twirled his gold watch-chain in a fashion to catch her eye. She noted his well-shaped and strong hand.

"I dare say you think I'm a happy man, Sarah Jane," he began abruptly.

"I don't think anything about you," she answered; "but all the same, you ought to be. Why not? Everything goes well with you, don't it? Mr. Huggins met me in the

village as I came along. He says that you've bought Widow Routleigh's beautiful house at the corner, and only wait for her to die to go into it. And the new leat will run right through the orchard."

"So it will. But don't think that was a chance. I worked it all out and knew the water must come that way. I'd bought the ground, at my own price, before the old woman even guessed the water was coming. I say this to show you how far I look ahead."

"Of course you do—like Mrs. Weekes. You've got her great cleverness, no doubt."

"That's true, and I could give you many instances if you wanted them. But, all the same, there's much worth having that money won't buy. Ban't the root of all good, as some think, any more than 'tis the root of all evil, as other fools pretend—chiefly them as lack it. Money's all right, but not all-powerful. You, for instance—I know you well enough to know that money don't count for everything with you."

Sarah Jane plucked a spray of sweet wormwood that grew out of the wall within reach of her hand. She bruised it and passed its pale gold and silver thoughtfully under her nose.

"I'd dearly like to have money," she said.

"You would?"

"Dearly. I'd sooner have a hoss of my own to ride than most anything I can think of."

"A very fine idea, no doubt. And very fine you'd look upon one."

She smelt the wormwood, then flung it through the window and turned to him.

"But I wouldn't sell myself for that. I've never thought out the subject of money, and maybe never shall. Faither's always on about it; but 'tis only a sort of shadowy fancy in his mind, like the next world, or China, or any other place beyond his knowledge. Money's just a big idea to him and me. But I doubt if we had it, whether we should know how ever to manage it."

"Your father's no better than a wild man," said Jarratt impatiently. "So full of foggy hopes and opinions—nought practical about any of 'em. Now I'm nothing if not practical; and more are you. 'Tis that I've felt about you ever since you was wife-old. But what d'you think of me? People have an idea nobody could make much cash in a place the size of Lydford. Let 'em think so. But I tell you, Sarah Jane, that 'tis often the smallest stream holds the biggest trout. And I tell you another thing: I love you with all my heart and soul. There's nobody like you in the world. You're a rare woman, an' pretty as a picture to begin with; but that ban't all. You've got what's more than good looks, and wears better, and helps a busy man on his way. You'd not hinder a husband, but back him up with all your strength. Never was a body with less nonsense about her. In fact, I've been almost frightened sometimes, to think how awful little nonsense there is about your nature—for so young a woman. It comes of living up-along wi' nought but natural things for company. There's no lightness nor laughter up there."

He stopped for breath; but she did not speak. Then he proceeded.

"Not that I blame you for being so plain-spoken. 'Tis often the best way of all, an' saves a deal of precious time. And time's money. You only want a little more experience of the ways of people, to shine like a star among common women, who sail with the wind and always say what they think you'll best like to hear. But that's nought. The thing I want to say is that I love you, Sarah Jane, and there's nothing in life I'd like better than to make a beautiful home for you, with every comfort that my purse can afford in it. And a horse you certainly shall have; an' I'll teach you how to ride him. You're a thought too large for a pony, but a good upstanding cob—and a pleasant sight 'twould be."

"Nobody could say fairer, I'm sure."

"Then will you have me? I'm not good enough, or

anywheres near it. Still, as men go, in these parts, you might do worse—eh?"

"A lot worse. What does your mother think about it?"

"She would sooner I married you than anybody—'if I must marry at all.' That was her view."

"Why marry at all, Jarratt Weekes? Ban't you very comfortable as you are?"

"Not a very loverly question," he said, somewhat ruefully. "I'm afraid you don't care much about me, Sarah Jane."

"I don't like your eyes," she answered. "I like the rest of you very well. And, after all's said, you can't help 'em."

"There 'tis!" he exclaimed, half in admiration, half in annoyance. "What girl on God's earth but you would say a thing like that to a man that's offering marriage to her? To quarrel with my eyes be a foolish trick all the same. You might so well blame my hair, or my ears, or my hands."

"Your hand is a fine, strong-shaped sort of hand."

"Take it then," he cried, "and keep it; an' give me yours. Let me run my life for you evermore; and for your good and for your betterment. I'm tired of running it for myself. I never knew how empty a man's life can be—not till I met you; and there's the cottage, crawled over with honeysuckle, and the swallows' nests under the eaves, and the lovely orchard and all! All waiting your good pleasure, Sarah Jane, the moment that old woman drops."

"I don't reckon I could marry you—such a lot goes to it. Still, I'll be fair to you and take a bit of time to think it over."

"You've got two strings to your bow, of course—like all you pretty women?"

"No, I haven't. Yet—well, there's a man I've seen a few times lately. And I do take to him something wonderful. There's that about him I've never felt in no other man.

Only, so far as I know, he don't care a button for me. He may be tokened, come to think of it. I never heard him say he wasn't. I never thought of that!"

She sat quite absorbed by this sudden possibility, while Jarratt Weekes stared angrily at her.

"You'll puzzle me to my dying day," he growled. "If any other female could talk such things, we'd say it was terrible unmaidenly in her; but you—naked truth's indecent in most mouths—it seems natural to yours. Not that I like you the better for it."

"He's a huge man, and works at Ruddyford. He's been drawing peat these last few days, and I've had speech with him, an' gived him cider thrice. To see him drink!"

"Damn him and his cider!" said Weekes, irritably. "A common labourer! You really ought to pride yourself a thought higher, Sarah Jane. What would your poor mother have said?"

"She done exactly the same herself. And a prettier woman far than me when she was young. For faither's often told me so. He's raised himself since he was married. So might this chap. All the same, I don't know whether he gives me a thought when I'm out of his sight."

"I think of nought but you—all day long."

"And widows' houses, and a few other things! Of course you do. You haven't got up in the world by wasting your time."

"Say 'yes,' and be done with it, Sarah."

"I'll leave it for a round month, then I'll tell you."

"You'll leave it—just to see what this hulking lout on the Moor may do."

"Yes. But he's not a lout. I'm certainly not going to take you till I know if he cares for me. If he does, I'll have him, for he's made me feel very queer—so queer that it can't be anything but love. And if he don't ax inside six weeks, I'll take you."

"You're the sort to go and tell him to ask you," he said, bitterly.

"No, no! I won't do that. I'm a very modest woman really, though you don't seem to think so. I'll not run after him."

"You're mad to dream of such a thing."

"Very likely; but there 'tis. Now us had better go back-along. I promised Mr. Weekes to pour out tea for him this evening afore I went home."

"I'll walk back with you."

"No need. Father's going to meet me on the old tram-line. He's down to Lake to-day."

They returned to the cottage of Philip Weekes, and found the company assembled.

There were present a very ancient, wrinkled man with a thin, white beard, called Valentine Huggins. As happens sometimes, he had out-lived his Christian name, and an appellation, proper to youth, seemed so ridiculous applied to a veteran of fourscore that nobody ever called him by it but one or two of his own generation, who did not mark the humour. Mr. Huggins was the oldest inhabitant of Lydford, and could count numerous grandchildren, though his own sons and daughters were nearly all dead. Adam Churchward, the schoolmaster, and his daughter Mary completed the gathering. He was large, hairless, ponderous, and flatulent; she nearly approached beauty, but her mouth was thin, and her voice served to diminish the pleasure given by her bright, dark face. The tone of it sounded harsh and rough, and when she spoke two little deep lines at their corners increased the asperity of her lips.

"I suppose we may say, in the words of the harvest hymn, that 'all is safely gathered in,'" remarked Mr. Churchward, as he drank his tea. "A good harvest, the work-folk tell me—or, rather, their children." He lifted his protuberant, short-sighted and rather silly eyes upward, to the conventional angle of piety.

"A very good harvest, I believe," admitted Philip, "and good all round—so the missis brought word from market last week."

"I trust the operations of sale and barter have been all that you could wish," added Mr. Churchward.

"Nothing to grumble at—very good markets," declared Philip, "though my partner never will admit it. Still, figures speak, and though she may pretend to lose her temper, I always know. Her pretences ban't like the real thing."

"No pretence about it when Aunt Hepsy's in a right-down tantara of a rage," said Susan.

"An unusual name—a Scriptural name," remarked the schoolmaster. "Has the significance of the name of 'Hephzibah' ever struck your mind, neighbour? It means, 'my delight is in her.'"

"So I've been told," answered the husband, drily. Indeed, his tone silenced the other, and, perceiving that he had apparently struck a wrong note of suggestiveness, Philip made haste to speak again.

"Nobody ever had a more suitable name, I'm sure. This house wouldn't be this house without her."

Jarratt Weekes and Sarah Jane now returned, and the subject was dropped by implicit understanding.

"I hope your great son, William, be well," said Sarah to the schoolmaster.

"Very well indeed, I thank you," he answered. "I could wish he had a little of his parent's zeal for toil, but he lacks it."

"Why for did he give up his shop work?" she asked.

"To be honest, it was rather undignified. For my son to fill that position was not quite respectful to me. He insisted upon it, but after a time, as I expected, found the duties irksome. I was not sorry when he changed his mind and returned to his painting."

"All the same, he's eating his head off now," said Mary Churchward.

"I shouldn't say that," declared William's father. "He helps me with the elder scholars. I have little doubt that some outlet for his artistic energies may soon be forthcoming. He has even an idea of going abroad."

"Do they still call him the 'Infant'?" asked Mr. Weekes.

"I believe so. How time flies with those who work as we do! *Tempus fugit*, I'm sure. It seems only yesterday that he was really an infant. In these arms the physician placed him some hours after his birth, with the remark that never had he introduced a fatter boy into the world."

"So I've heard you say," answered the huckster. "Give Mary another cup of tea, please, Sarah Jane."

"Yes," continued Mr. Churchward. "At first I had reason to believe that William would develop very unusual intellects. His childhood was rich in evidences of a precocious mind. But it seemed, in the race between brain and body, that after a struggle the physical being out-distanced the mental spirit. If I am becoming too subtle, stop me. But you may have observed that men above six feet high are seldom brilliantly intelligent."

"I know a chap who is, however," said Sarah Jane. "A young man bigger than your son, Mr. Churchward, but a very great thinker in his way—so my father says."

Mr. Churchward raised his eyebrows incredulously, and at the same moment bowed.

"Bill's sharp enough, and father knows it," said Mary Churchward. "He's horrid lazy; that's all that's the matter with him. If he had to work, 'twould be a very good thing for him."

"The questions that child used to ask me!" continued Adam. "Why, I believe it is allowed that I can reply to most people—am I right, Huggins?"

"Never yet knowed you to be floored," replied Mr. Huggins, in an aged treble. "There's the guts of a whole libr'y of books packed behind your gert yellow forehead, schoolmaster."

"Thank you, Huggins," said Mr. Churchward, with dignity. "Thank you. Truth has always been your guiding star since I have known you, and though your words

are homely, they come from the heart. Pass me the sally-lunns, Susan, and I'll tell you a good thing Will said when he was no more than seven years old."

Mr. Churchward selected a cake, nibbled it, then waved it.

"Stop me if I have narrated this narrative before. I was giving the child a lesson in divinity. Indeed, at one time I had thoughts of the calling for him, but his mind took another turn."

"He don't believe in nothing now—nothing at all," said Mary, "except himself."

"You wrong him there. He is a Christian at heart, if I am any student of character. But as a child, he indulged in curious doubts. 'God made all things, I suppose, father?' he asked me on the occasion I speak of. 'Yes, my little man, He did indeed,' I answered. 'He made hell then?' he asked. 'Surely,' I admitted. 'Was it for Mr. Satan and his friends, so that they would all be comfy together?' he asked. 'No doubt that they should be together; but far from "comfy,"' I replied; 'and take good care, my child, that it shall never be said of you that you are one of those friends.' Now is not that a remarkable instance of juvenile penetration?"

"An' very good answers you made the nipper, I'm sure," said Mr. Weekes.

Here Jarratt changed the subject abruptly, and conversation ranged over matters more generally interesting than the schoolmaster's son.

"The water will be into Lydford come June next or a little later, they tell me," said the keeper of the castle. "I was showing the head engineer over the ruin last week—for all the times he'd been here he'd never seen it—and there's no doubt at all that the work will be done by next spring."

"Then I must begin to think of our preparations," answered Adam. "You may be aware that I am responsible for the idea that something of an exceptional nature shall be carried out to mark the arrival of the water. I mentioned

it to the vicar two or three months ago, and he—well, if I may say so, he showed a coldness."

"Always is cold unless he thinks of a thing himself," said Jarratt.

"I'm afraid you have hit off his character in a nutshell. However, I am not to be shaken where I think the good of Lydford is concerned. 'It's a year too soon to begin thinking of it,' said the vicar to me; but I explained that these things must be taken in time and carefully thought out. 'Do it yourself then, since you're so set upon it,' he said. 'Then you'll have no objection to my proceeding in the matter, your reverence?' I asked, 'for I should like everything *ex cathedrâ* and in order.' 'Oh, do what you like, only don't let it be anything ridiculous,' he answered, in his unkind, off-hand style. 'I'm not the man to bring ridicule on Lydford or myself, I believe,' I replied, in my haughty way."

"Had him there," chuckled Mr. Huggins.

"And with that I just bowed myself out."

"Us'll do it without troubling him, then," declared Philip Weekes. "The matter's very safe in your hands, neighbour."

"I think it is. Without self-praise—a thing I have never been accused of—I think it is. My own idea is matured, but I am quite prepared to hear that a better one is forthcoming."

"You should call a meeting and have a committee," suggested Jarratt.

"My idea was to have the committee without the meeting. For instance—we here assembled—why can't we elect a committee?"

"'Twill be too hole-and-corner," said Jarratt.

"Not at all, not at all. This is neither a hole nor yet a corner, but the house of one of the burgesses of Lydford. We represent various interests. I stand *in propriâ personâ* for advancement and intellectual attainments, and the arts and sciences, and such-like; Jarratt Weekes is for business

and mercantile pursuits and commerce; Mr. Huggins—well, he's the oldest inhabitant. 'Twould be a very right and proper thing to have him on the committee."

"Should like nothing better, souls," declared Mr. Huggins. "Talk I won't, but there must be some to listen."

"We ought to have a few more—seven or eight in all," said the younger Weekes. "Then we'll get through a scheme of some sort and hear what you've got to say, schoolmaster."

"The vicar will be very like to put his spoke in it if your ideas don't meet his views," suggested Philip, and Mr. Churchward's large pendulous cheeks flushed a delicate pink at the idea.

"I'm sorry to hear you say that. I hope you're wrong. He gave me a free hand, remember."

Presently the company separated. Mr. Huggins was going by Sarah Jane's way, and he walked beside her; the Churchwards went to evening worship; Jarratt disappeared with his own anxious heart; and Mr. Weekes, hiding all evidence of inward thought, harnessed his pony and drove off to Lydford, to meet the train which was bringing his wife and her baskets home from Plymouth.

CHAPTER VIII

A REPRIMAND

Now Nature thundered the hymn of the autumnal equinox; ancient trees waved their last before it; men told of a cloudburst, at midnight, over the central Moor. Every river roared in freshet; the springs overflowed and rolled down the grassy hills, where, in summer, no water was; cherry-coloured torrents, under banks of yellow spume, tumbled into the valleys; storm followed upon storm, and the fall of the year came in no peaceful guise, but like a ruthless army. Not until the epact did peace brood again, and fiery dawns, pallid noons and frosty nights gave the great waste sleeping into the hand of winter.

Daniel Brendon settled to his work, and personal regrets that his position should be so unimportant were thrust to the back of his mind for the present by a greater matter. He was in love with Sarah Jane Friend, and knew it. To him fell the task of drawing peat with horse and cart from Amicombe Hill, and his journeys offered not a few opportunities of meeting with the woman. Once at her home, once in the peat works, he spoke with her. On the latter occasion she had just taken her father's dinner to him, and after Gregory was settled with the contents of a tin can and a little basket, Sarah proposed to Daniel that she should show him certain secret places in this ruin. The peat works had been her playground as a child, and she knew every hole and corner of them; but since silence and failure had made the place a home, Sarah chose rather to shun it. The very buildings scowled, where they huddled together and cringed to Time to spare them. She noted this, and felt that the place was mean and horrible, but with Dan beside her, ancient interests wakened, and she took him to see her haunts.

"I had a dear little cubby hole here," she said, and showed him a great empty drum, from which one side had fallen.

"This used to be filled with peat and be set spinning, so that the stuff should get broke up and dried," she explained; "but now 'tis as you see. I've often crept in there and gone to sleep by the hour. 'Tis full of dried heather. An old man that used to work with father spread it for me five years ago. He's dead, but the heather's there yet."

There was ample room within the huge drum even for Brendon. They sat together for a while, and ever afterwards in his thought the place was consecrated to Sarah Jane. He believed that she liked him, but her fearless attitude and outspoken methods with men and women made him distrustful. So weeks passed, and he gradually grew to know her better. After the Sunday at Lydford he went in fear and trembling, but she said nothing about the matter, and when he asked Mr. Friend behind her back whether indeed his daughter was engaged, the peat-master told him that it was not so.

"As became her father, I axed her," he said, "an' in her usual style she told me all about it. Jarratt Weekes offered to wed, and set out his high prospects in a very gentlemanlike manner; but she said neither 'yea' nor 'nay' to him. I axed her why not, seeing as she've a great gift of making up her mind most times—more like a man than a woman in that respect. But she said for once that she wasn't sure of herself. She'll see him again in a month or so, and then he'll have his answer."

"Thank you, I'm sure; it's very impertinent of me presuming to ask," said Daniel, "but, to be plain with you, Mr. Weekes, I'm terrible interested."

"So am I," answered the father. "She's a lovely piece—even I see that. But it ban't a case where a parent will do any good. She'll take her own line, and want none to help her decide. If she was to go, I don't think I should bide here."

"Would you tear yourself away from the works?"

"Go from the works! Not likely. But I should leave Dunnagoat Cottage and live up there."

"Good powers! You wouldn't do that?"

"Why for not? Ban't no ghosts there?"

Daniel shrugged his shoulders.

"Your darter won't let you do it," he said.

With a full mind, the labourer pursued his days. How to speak and tell her that he loved her was the problem. He tried to fortify himself by reviewing his own prospects, but they lent no brightness at this moment. He had fifty pounds saved, and was getting five-and-twenty shillings a week—unusually good wages—but the authority he desired seemed no nearer. Strange thoughts passed through his brain, and he referred them to the powers in which he trusted.

"What's God up to with me now, I wonder?" he asked himself. The words were flippant, but the spirit in which he conceived them profoundly reverent. The suspense and tension of the time made him rather poor company for Agg, Lethbridge, and the widowed Joe Tapson. Indeed, between himself and the last there had risen a cloud. Brendon was dictatorial in matters of farm procedure, and by force of character won imperceptibly a little of the control he wanted. His love for work assisted him; not seldom he finished another's labour, simply because he enjoyed the task and knew that he could perform it better than his companion. Agg and Lethbridge were easy men, and Daniel's hunger for toil caused them no anxiety. They let him assume an attitude above them, and often asked him for help and advice; but Tapson, on the other hand, developed a very jealous spirit. He was ignorant and exceedingly obstinate. He had always regarded himself as second in command, under Mr. Prout, and to find this modest responsibility swept from him became a source of great annoyance. Twice he ventured to command Daniel,

and once the new man obeyed, because he approved Tapson's idea; but on the second occasion he happened to be in a bad temper, and told Joe to mind his own business and not order his betters about. The rebuff rankled in the elder's bosom, and he puzzled long what course to pursue. Agg and Lethbridge were no comfort to him. Indeed, both laughed at the widower's concern.

"You silly old mumphead," said the genial Walter Agg; "what be you grizzling at? Any man's welcome to order me about, so long as he'll do my work for me."

Lethbridge grinned approval. He was a stout, flat-faced man without ambition.

"That's sound sense, an' my view to a hair," he declared. "The chap's got strength for five men—then let him do the work, since he's so blessed fond of it. He's a very fine man, an' my master any day of the week, though he don't get much better money. For my part I think he ought to, and I told him so; an' he was so blessed pleased to hear me say it, that he shifted two tons of muck, which was my job, while I looked on, like a gentleman, till master come into the yard!"

Agg roared with laughter. His laugh echoed against the stone walls of the farm, and Hilary Woodrow liked to hear it.

"Right you are, fatty! Dan's a very good sort, and long may be bide here."

"You be lazy hounds, and not worth a pin, the pair of you," answered the little man with the goat's beard. "But I'll not stand none of his high-handedness. Next time I orders him about and he pretends he don't hear, I'll have him up afore Mr. Woodrow."

"More fool you, Joe," replied Agg.

But Mr. Tapson's intention was not fulfilled, for the matter took a sensational turn, and when he did carry his tribulations to head-quarters, they were of a colour more grave than he expected.

On a day in late November Tapson was leading a cart

piled with giant swedes through one of the lowest meadows of the farm. The mighty roots faded from white to purple, and drooping, glaucous foliage hung about their crowns. Following the cart, or straggling behind it to gnaw the turnips as he scattered them, came fifty breeding ewes. There was a crisp sound of fat roots being munched by the sheep. The air hung heavy, and the day was grey and mild. Looking up, the labourer saw Daniel Brendon approaching.

"Now for it!" thought Mr. Tapson, and his lips framed an order. "I'll tell the man to go and fetch me a fork from the byre."

He was about to do so, when Brendon himself shouted from a distance of fifty yards, and, to Tapson's amazement, he found himself commanded.

"Get down out of thic cart an' lend a hand here, Joe. I want 'e!"

Every line of the widower's brown face wrinkled into wrath. His very beard bristled. He growled to himself, and his solitary eye blazed.

"You want me, do 'e?" he shouted. "You'll be ordering up the Queen of England next, I suppose?"

"Don't be a fool, and come here, quick."

Mr. Tapson permitted himself a vulgar gesture. Then, chattering and snorting like an angry monkey, he continued to throw swedes upon the meadow. Brendon hesitated and approached. As he did so the widower remembered his own intention.

"You go and get me a fork from the byre; that's what I tell you to do—so now then!" he said, as Daniel arrived.

It happened that the big man was not in a good temper. Private anxieties fretted him exceedingly. His way was obscure. He had prayed to be shown a right course with respect to Sarah Jane, yet there dawned no definite idea. He loved her furiously, and half suspected that she liked him, but the miserable uncertainty and suspense of the time weighed upon him, so that his neighbours shook their heads behind his back and deplored his harshness.

"Be you going to do my bidding, or ban't you, Joe Tapson?" inquired Daniel.

"Not me, you overbearing peacock! Who be you, I should like to know, to tell me I'm to stir foot? Prout's the only man above me on this farm."

Brendon considered. He was about to express regret that he had hurt Mr. Tapson's feelings, but Joe spoke again, and the listener changed his mind.

"You'm a gert bully, like all you over-growed men. Good God A'mighty! because I had bad luck with my wife, and was very down-trodden in my youth, and lost an eye among other misfortunes, be that any reason why the first bull of Bashan as comes along should order me about as if I was the dirt under his feet? Never was such a thing heard of! You'm here to work, I believe, not to talk an' give yourself silly airs."

"If that's your opinion us had best go to master," said Daniel.

"This instant moment, and the sooner the better!" answered the other.

He took his horse and cart to the gate, hitched the reins there, and walked beside Brendon into the farmyard. Neither spoke until it happened that Hilary Woodrow met them. He was just going out riding, and Agg stood by with a handsome brown mare.

Daniel and Joe both began to speak together. Then the master of Ruddyford silenced them, sent Agg out of earshot, and bade Joe tell his tale.

"'Tis which he should betwixt me and this man here," began the elder. "Be he to order me about, like a lost dog, or be I set in authority over him? That's all I want to know, your honour. Agg and Lethbridge do let him do it, but I won't; I'll defy him to his face—a wise man, up home sixty year old, like me! 'Tis a disgrace to nature as I should go under him—as have forgot more than this here man ever knowed, for all his vainglorious opinions!"

Woodrow nodded.

"That'll do for you, Joe. Now go about your business. I'll speak to Brendon."

Tapson touched his forehead and withdrew reluctantly. He had hoped to hear his enemy roughly handled; he had trusted to gather from his master's lips a word or two that might be remembered and used with effect on some future occasion. But it was not to be. He returned to the swedes, and only learnt the issue some hours afterwards from Daniel himself.

Unluckily for Brendon, Woodrow also was not in a pleasant mood this morning. He suffered from general debility, for which there was no particular course, and to-day rheumatism had returned, and was giving him some pain in the chest and shoulders. He rode now to see his medical man, and felt in no mood for large sympathy or patience.

"A few words will meet this matter," he said. "When you came here I told you that the sheep-dogs would be expected to obey you, and nobody else."

"Can't we ax each other to——?"

"Be silent till I have spoken. You're too fond of raising your voice and pointing your hand. Do your work with less noise. In this farm Prout's head man, and Tapson comes under him. With sane people there's no question of authority at all. All work together for the good of the place, and all are well paid for their trouble. But, since you seem so anxious to command, let me tell you that I won't have it. You're the last to come, and you're the least among us. You do your work well enough, and I've no personal fault to find; nor yet has Prout; but if you're going to be too big for your shoes, the quicker we part the better for both of us."

Brendon grew hot; then Sarah Jane filled his mind, and he cooled again. He made a mighty effort and controlled his temper. He was not cowed, but spoke civilly and temperately. Woodrow himself had kept perfectly cool, and his example helped the labourer.

"Thank you, sir," said Dan. "I see quite clear now. I should be very sorry indeed to leave you, and I'm very wishful to please you. You shan't have nothing to grumble at again."

"That's a good fellow. Don't think I'm blind, or so wrapt up in my affairs that I don't watch what's doing. You hear Tapson say all sorts of things about me, for he's not very fond of me, though he pretends to be. But trust Prout before the others. He knows me. I'm not a godless man, and all the rest of that rot. Only I mind my own business, and don't wear my heart on my sleeve. I'm ill to-day, or perhaps I should not have spoken so sharply. Still, I take back nothing. Now tell Agg to bring my horse to the uppingstock. Lord knows how I shall mount, for my shoulders are one ache."

"I'll help you, please," said Daniel; and a moment later he assisted Hilary Woodrow into the saddle. The farmer thanked him, groaned, then walked his horse quietly away.

Agg looked after his master.

"Was he short with 'e? Us have to keep our weather eyes lifting when he's sick."

"Not at all," answered Brendon. "He only told me a thing or two I'd forgotten."

"Ban't much you forget, I reckon," answered the red man. Then he went his way, and Brendon returned to his work and his reflections.

He felt no anger at this reprimand. He was surprised with himself to find how placid he remained under it. But he knew the reason. His subordinate position was as nothing weighed against the possibility of leaving Sarah Jane. He quickly came to a conclusion with himself, and determined, at any cost of disappointment, to speak to her and ask her to marry him. If she refused, he would quit Ruddyford; if she accepted him, he would stay there—for the present. His mind became much quieted upon this decision, and he found leisure to reflect concerning his

master. Woodrow had been curiously communicative at the recent interview, and his confession concerning himself interested his man. From Daniel's point of view the farmer's life was godless, for he never obeyed any outward regulations, and openly declared himself of no Christian persuasion. Yet his days were well ordered, and he neither openly erred nor offended anybody. Brendon wondered upon what foundation Mr. Woodrow based his scheme of conduct, and whither he looked for help and counsel. That man can trust reason to sustain his footsteps he knew not; and, indeed, at that date, to find one of Woodrow's education and breeding strongly sceptical of mind was a phenomenon. Such, however, had been his bent, and, like many others who turn strongly by instinct from all dogmas, the farmer yet found ethics an attractive subject, and sharpened his intellect daily with such books as upheld reason against faith. He was self-conscious concerning his unorthodox opinions, but secretly felt proud of them. Fifty years ago, to be agnostic was to be without the pale. None trusted Woodrow, and religious-minded folk resented his existence. The local clergymen would not know him. Perhaps only one man, John Prout, stood stoutly for him in the face of all people, and declared that he could do no wrong.

That night Brendon smoked his pipe in a cart-shed and spoke to Mr. Tapson.

"I'm sorry I ordered you to come to me, Joe," he said, "and I'm sorrier still that I didn't get the fork when you told me to do it. Master's made all clear to me. Prout's head man and you're second—so there it stands; and you shan't have no call to find fault again."

"Enough said," answered the other. "Us must all stand up for ourselves in this world, Brendon, because there's nobody else to do it. Therefore I up and spoke. But I'm very desirous to be friends, and I know your good parts."

"So be it then," answered Daniel.

CHAPTER IX

THE COMMITTEE MEETS

MR. CHURCHWARD found some difficulty in arranging a representative committee to consider the water leat celebrations. Many refused to join him—among others Woodrow. To the master of Ruddyford he wrote, in his expansive way, and begged that he would "represent the outlying agricultural interests"; but Hilary declined, and John Prout consented to fill his place.

"'Tis all smoke and wind, no doubt, but 'twill please the man," he said.

There met together at the schoolmaster's house Jarratt Weekes, old Valentine Huggins, Noah Pearn—the landlord of the Castle Inn—John Prout, and two others—men of repute in Lydford. They were the miller, Jacob Taverner, and the postmaster, a weak and pink-eyed person, called Nathaniel Spry. Him Mr. Churchward regarded as a satellite, and patronized in a manner at once unctuous and august.

Weekes opened the proceedings while the men were getting out of their coats.

"Is Squire Calmady coming?" he asked.

"I regret to say that he is not," answered the schoolmaster. "I approached him *in propriâ personâ* by letter, and he replied that the meeting would be very safe in our hands. I hope you all think the same. Anyhow, we have paid him the compliment; we can do no more."

"There's no gentlefolks on the committee, then?"

Mr. Taverner, who was a stout radical, and saturated with class prejudice, resented this suggestion.

"Gentle or not gentle, Jarratt Weekes, we are all pretty solid men, and know how to behave, I believe."

"I vote Mr. Churchward into the chair, neighbours,"

said the postmaster. "Then we shall have wisdom over the committee."

Adam bridled, but held up his hand in a deprecating manner.

"I want no power—nothing of the sort. I'm only your servant in this matter. But since somebody must—in fact, I leave myself in your hands."

"'Tis your own house, so you'd better take the lead, and I'll second the motion," declared John Prout.

"Shall us smoke, or would it be out of order?" asked the landlord of the Castle Inn.

Spry looked imploringly at the schoolmaster. He hated the smell of tobacco, and suffered from a nervous cough. But Mr. Churchward liked his pipe as well as smaller men, and he declared for smoke.

"I've a new box of 'churchwardens' in this drawer," he said. "I beg the committee will make free with them. Now—but where's Mr. Norseman? Speaking the word 'churchwarden' reminded me of him. We want him to complete the committee."

The official in question almost immediately joined them. Henry Norseman was a swarthy, black-bearded, sanctimonious man, the factor of important estates, and churchwarden of the people.

They sat round the table that Mr. Churchward had cleared for them. Pens and paper were arranged upon it, and the box of clay pipes stood in the midst. A fire burnt on the hearth, and two oil lamps gave light.

"'Tis a very comfortable committee, I'm sure," said Mr. Huggins, stretching for a tobacco pipe, and bringing a flat metal box from his trouser pocket to fill it.

Mr. Churchward opened the proceedings.

"What we have to decide is the sort of thing we are going to do the day the water comes into Lydford. I have my idea, but I am quite prepared to submit it *sub rosa*. If anybody has a better one, I shall be the first to agree thereto. Now my notion is a public holiday and a procession. This

procession should start from the high road and walk through Lydford down to Little Lydford, and back. At a foot's pace 'twould take not above three hours."

"And I propose that the procession stops at the Castle Inn on the way back," said Mr. Pearn.

"Why?" asked Jarratt Weekes, pointedly, and the publican bristled up.

"Why *do* people stop at an inn?" he asked, in his turn. "That's a damn silly question, if ever I heard one."

"You're out of order," retorted Weekes. "Though, of course, we all know very well your meaning."

Mr. Pearn lifted his chin very high.

"All right, all right!" he said. "What d'you want to open your mouth so wide for? I suppose every man of this committee has a right to be heard? And I suppose we've all got an axe to grind, else we shouldn't be here?"

"You'll have your say in due course, Noah Pearn. Don't waste the committee's time interrupting," said Mr. Prout.

But the landlord proceeded.

"I'm the last to want to waste anybody's time—know the value of time too well. But this I will say, that I'll give a free lunch to fifty people on the day—three courses, and hot joints with the first—if 'tis understood everyone pays for his own drinks. That's my offer; take it or leave it. So now then!"

"I was going to say 'order'; but, since you submit a definite proposal, I won't, Mr. Pearn. Well, that seems a patriotic offer—eh, gentlemen?"

Mr. Churchward glanced about him and caught Mr. Henry Norseman's eye.

"We ought to vote on that," declared the churchwarden. "I'm against liquor, as you know, and cannot support the idea, owing to conscience."

"No good voting—I don't care what you vote, and I don't care for a teetotaler's conscience. Take it or leave

it. Free lunches for fifty, and them as drinks pays for it," repeated Mr. Pearn.

"I advise the committee to accept that," said the miller Taverner. "'Tis a public-spirited offer, and if Noah does well out of the beer, why shouldn't he? In fact, I second it."

"Are we agreed?" asked Mr. Churchward, and all held up a hand but Mr. Norseman. The publican resented his attitude as a personal slight.

"Don't you come to fill your belly with my free lunch, then—that's all, for you won't be served," he said, furiously.

"Have no fear," answered the other. "I never support drink, and never shall, Mr. Pearn."

"Order—order!" cried the chairman. "The free lunch is carried. Now, neighbours, please hear me. The first thing to decide is, shall we or shall we not have a procession? If any man can think of a better idea, let him speak."

"Impossible," declared the postmaster. "You have hit on exactly the right thing, Mr. Chairman. A procession is the highest invention the human mind can ever reach on great occasions, and the most famous events of the world, from ancient times downwards, are always marked so. The bigger the affair, the longer the procession. History is simply packed full of them."

"Hear, hear, Spry!" said Mr. Taverner. "And what the postmaster says is true. 'Tis always a solemn sight to see men walking two by two, whether they be worthies of the nation or mere convicts chained together."

The committee, without a dissentient voice, agreed to a procession, and Mr. Churchward was much gratified. He bowed from the chair.

"I'm very pleased to have been the humble instrument of expressing your views in a word, gentlemen," he began. "And now arises the question of the nature of the pageant."

"The Goose Club might walk, for one thing," suggested Mr. Prout.

"It shall," answered Pearn; "as the president of the Goose Club, I can promise that."

"And I'll speak for the Ancient Dartymoor Druids—Lydford Branch," said Jacob Taverner. "But I won't promise the banner if the day be wet. It cost three pounds, and wouldn't stand weather."

"That's very good to begin with, I'm sure," declared Mr. Churchward; then old Huggins made his first contribution to the debate.

"Us must have brass moosic, souls. There's nought like trumpets—they'll carry off anything. I mind when Jimmy Briggs was buried there never was a poorer funeral—nought but five or six humble creatures behind, and me an' a few other men to carry him. But, just as we stopped to change hands, what should go by but a four-hoss coach! And the guard didn't see us, and blowed a sudden blast as would sartainly have made us drop the carpse if he hadn't been on the ground for the moment. But there 'twas; it gave a great grandeur to the scene, and comforted the mourners, like the Trump of Doom."

"Brass music, of course," said Jarratt Weekes. "The Okehampton Yeomanry band is very good, and their black and silver uniforms would look fine in the show."

"They'll cost a pot of money; that's the worst of them," said the postmaster.

"As to that, my dear Spry, we must, of course, approach the subject in a large and hopeful spirit. When everything is arranged I shall propose an appeal to the district. I have thought of this, too, and, I consider, if we can collect thirty to forty pounds, that should cover all expenses."

Mr. Churchward it was who spoke.

"You'll never get as much as that—or half of it," declared Weekes. "What are you going to show 'em for the money?"

"That's the point. I propose——"

Mr. Taverner, who had been whispering with Mr. Pearn, interrupted.

"Excuse me if I'm not in order; but I beg to say that talking's dry work, and I should like for to ask if we may send round to the 'Castle' for a quart or two?"

The chairman looked round him.

"Agreed," said Mr. Prout. "I second that."

"I've no objection in the world," declared Mr. Churchward.

"I should have suggested it myself," remarked Noah Pearn; "but for obvious reasons, gentlemen, I couldn't."

They applauded his delicate feeling, and Adam spoke to Nathaniel Spry.

"If you walk across to the inn, Nat, you'll find my son in the bar for certain," he said. "Just tell him to fetch over two quarts of mild, and write it down to me; and put on your overcoat afore you go, for the night is sharp."

"And I'll ask for a bottle of lemonade, if there's no objection," added Mr. Norseman.

The publican was mollified at this order, and while the others talked, he turned to his former enemy.

"I hope you'll not think twice of what I said, and come to my free lunch with the rest, Henry Norseman," he said.

The other nodded.

"Plenty of time, plenty of time," he answered.

"I can't sit cool and hear beer attacked," explained Mr. Pearn. "As a man of reason, you must see that."

"Certainly, certainly. I'm not unreasonable—I'm large-minded even over beer, I believe. If we must have it—poison though it is—let us have it good."

"And the man who says he ever got bad beer at my house is a liar," concluded Mr. Pearn.

The schoolmaster rapped on the table and resumed the main discussion.

"Now as to this procession," he began. "We must have features. I believe I am allowed some claim to be original in my ideas. Indeed, I am too much so, and even in the scholastic line, find myself rather ahead of the times. But with a procession, what can be better than originality?

Then I say we must have some impersonations—historic characters—to walk in procession. They must be allegorical and typical, and, in fact, emblematical."

He paused for breath just as Mr. Spry returned.

"William's going to bring the beer to the committee in five minutes," said he.

"You've missed some long words, postmaster," remarked Mr. Taverner. "The chairman here have got a great thought for the procession. 'Twill be better than the riders,[1] if it can be done."

"Allegorical, emblematical, *et hoc genus omne*," declared Mr. Churchward, and mopped his forehead.

"Trust schoolmaster to make a regular, valiant revel of it," said Mr. Huggins. "'Twill be very near as good as Wombwell's beast show, if the committee only stands by Mr. Churchward to a man."

"Have you thought who the great characters should be?" asked Henry Norseman doubtfully.

"I may have done so, churchwarden," answered the chairman; 'but that's for us in committee. We must argue upon it. I invite you all to give your ideas; and what poor knowledge of history I may possess is at your service."

"St. George for one," said Jarratt Weekes; and everybody looked at Mr. Churchward.

He considered and nodded his head with gravity. The propriety of the idea was obvious; but Adam disliked the younger Weekes and grudged him credit.

"The patron Saint of England—eh? Well, there's no objection to him, certainly," he said, but without enthusiasm; and Jarratt instantly made his annoyance clear.

"Objection to St. George! Good God! I should think there wasn't any objection to St. George! What next, I wonder? If St. George ban't done, I'll leave the committee—so I tell you. You're glumpy because you didn't think of the man yourself!"

"Order! order!" cried Mr. Churchward. "Far be it

[1] *The Riders*, a circus.

from me to cast any slur on the name of St. George. But there are so many other notable personages to consider; and as I am of opinion that we can hardly manage more than five, or six at the outside, I felt doubtful. However, let us have St. George by all means. Those in favour of St. George will kindly signify the same in the usual manner."

St. George was honoured with a unanimous vote. Then Mr. Huggins piped in.

"And do let's have the old dragon, souls! St. Garge be nought without un."

"The dragon! The dragon, Huggins?" asked Mr. Churchward. "That's rather startling—and yet——"

"Certainly the dragon," said Mr. Prout firmly; "Valentine's right there."

"'The Infant' might play dragon very nice," suggested Mr. Pearn.

"Not he—too fat," declared Jarratt Weekes brutally; and William Churchward's father was a good deal hurt.

"My son it *not* too fat," he answered. "William may be stout; but I imagine a prosperous dragon *would* be stout, for that matter. Wasn't St. George's dragon prosperous before he met St. George, Mr. Spry? You are pretty well up in the heathen mythology, I believe."

"Thank you for that kind word, schoolmaster," said Spry. "And he was prosperous. 'Tis all a fable, but——"

At this moment William Churchward entered. He was a huge, burly, thick-necked young man with a voice that surprised the ear. One expected a solemn bass and heard a ridiculous treble. William had bulbous, pale grey eyes like his father's, flabby chops and a small mouth.

"There's your beer," he said. "Good Lord! you old blades be going it seemingly."

"Would you play dragon, 'Infant,' and let St. Garge pretend to stick his spear into 'e?" asked Mr. Huggins.

"Us be going to have a dragon in the procession—with St. George a slaying of him, William," explained Mr. Prout.

"The 'Infant' will never let himself be slain, I'm afraid?" murmured Nathaniel Spry in a questioning voice.

"You'll have to wear an outrageous tail, William, an' cover your gert carcase in glittering scales," declared Jacob Taverner. "But I don't think you ought to be allowed to roar, for you haven't got a dragon's voice—to say it kindly."

"'Twill come down to play-acting in a minute," grumbled Mr. Norseman, "and I don't hold with that, I warn the committee. If there's to be any May games of that sort, I'll lay it afore the vicar."

William helped himself to a churchwarden from the box, and prepared to depart.

"You'm a rare old rally," he said; "and all drunk a'ready, I should think."

"You don't follow the course of the argument, my son," explained his father. "However, I'll make it clear at another time. You mustn't stop now, because we are in committee, and it would be irregular."

"Bless you nose, I don't want to stop!" replied William. Then he made a mock bow and departed.

When he had gone, Mr. Spry, who was a peace-loving man, proposed that they should drop the dragon. Pearn, Prout and Taverner, however, held out for the monster loudly, and Mr. Huggins supported them.

"Better have a sub-committee to decide," sneered Jarratt Weekes; but Mr. Churchward ignored his satire and put the question to the vote.

"Dragon romps home!" cried John Prout.

"St. George and the Dragon have passed the committee," announced Mr. Churchward. "And now, gentlemen, perhaps you'll kindly help yourselves."

There was an interval of clinking glasses and bubbling liquor. A smell of beer permeated the chamber.

"All's going wonderful well," sighed Mr. Huggins. "I hope we haven't nearly finished yet."

Presently the discussion was resumed.

"With your permission, I will now myself submit a

character," said the chairman, "and it is no less a solemn figure than the patriarch Moses."

"Your reasons?" asked Jarratt Weekes sharply.

Mr. Churchward flushed, but was not disconcerted.

"Moses brought forth water from the rock. It would be symbolical and religious to have him in the procession. We've brought forth water from the rock. There you are—an allegory in fact."

"You couldn't have hit on a higher idea in history, schoolmaster," asserted Nathaniel Spry.

"There's no offence?" asked Mr. Norseman. "You're sure there's no offence, schoolmaster? You know what his reverence is."

"I do," answered the chairman. "And I also know what I am. I believe that, when it comes to decorum, Mr. Norseman, I am generally allowed to be *facile princeps*. If I am wrong I hope somebody will correct me."

Jarratt Weekes uttered a contemptuous sound into his glass as he drained it; then old Huggins spoke.

His voice was tremulous, and he evidently laboured under great suppressed excitement.

"I do beg and pray of the committee as you'll let me be Moses, souls! I'm old enough—up home fourscore to a week—just the man's age when he denied and defied King Pharaoh. An' my beard's a regular Moses beard; an' I'm accounted wise to the eye, so long as I keep my mouth shut. 'Twould be the first and last act of note that ever I should do, an' a very fine thing to be handed down in my favour for my grandchildren to remember."

There was an awkward silence. Mr. Prout and the schoolmaster whispered aside, Mr. Norseman and Mr. Taverner shook their heads.

"Let him—let the old blid do it," said John Prout under his breath. "Might be a gracious act. He couldn't mar it, if he said nought."

Mr. Spry also whispered into the chairman's ear.

"Does he bear himself straight enough in the back?

That's my fear. And the stone tables—he'd droop to the ground under them."

Mr. Huggins pleaded again.

"I'd wear the holy horns on my brow and everything; and many a married man would rather not. But 'tis nought to me."

"I had thought to write speeches in character for the emblematical people, and perhaps some verses," said Churchward; whereupon the face of the aged Huggins fell.

"Don't ax me to say nought," he begged. "Even as 'tis, if I walk as Moses, I shall be sweating for fear under my sacred coat; and if I had to tell a speech, I should disgrace myself and the company without a doubt."

"I'm against speeches altogether," declared Jarratt Weekes; "and so's Mr. Norseman here. We won't have no play-acting and no chattering of silly verses."

Mr. Churchward glared at his foe, and Weekes glared back and poured out more beer. The chairman thought of certain rhymes already in his desk, and Mr. Spry, who knew of these rhymes, cast a timorous and sympathetic eye at his gloomy friend.

"Schoolmaster's made some beautiful speeches, that nobody here could mend, for he's been so very good as to let me read them," he said.

But the sense of the meeting was for a dumb show; Mr. Huggins had his way and became self-conscious and nervous from that moment. Like greater men, he won his ambition and lost his peace of mind for evermore.

Sir Francis Drake, who brought water from Dartmoor to Plymouth, was suggested by the postmaster and agreed upon with enthusiasm; then Mr. Churchward proposed a Druid and Mr. Spry seconded, but Norseman protested.

"No heathen—no heathen!" he said. 'Twould be a reproach and make us a byword. Let's have St. Petrock —him that our church be named after. He might travel side by side of Moses, and keep the show well within Christianity."

"St. Petrock is good," declared Adam Churchward. "St. Petrock is a thought worthy of you, Norseman. Spry and I will consult our books about him. I second that, certainly."

The drink was done, and Mr. Pearn, aware that his part in the debate had sunk to nothing, advanced an idea.

"Why for shouldn't us have a lady hero? How would it be, Mr. Chairman, 'if Jezebel, Queen of Sheba, went among 'em?"

"Jezebel wasn't Queen of Sheba," answered several voices simultaneously.

"Not?" exclaimed the publican. "There now! If I didn't always think she was."

"You should read your Bible better, Noah Pearn," said Mr. Norseman; "and I object to women displaying themselves in the show at all."

"Churchwarden's right: don't have no women," advised John Prout. "They'm not fitted in their intellects to stand the strain of a public procession without getting too overbearing. They'm better kept under, in my opinion. You might lift up some comely maiden and turn her head for all time by it."

"If we had a queen at all, it should be Queen Elizabeth," said Mr. Churchward.

"Why?" asked Weekes.

"To walk along with Sir Francis Drake," answered the postmaster promptly. "That's sound history and sound sense."

"Don't have no queens," urged Mr. Prout. "Mark me, they'll spoil all with their giggling and nonsense."

"How be the heroes going to travel?" inquired Taverner. "For my part I think a hay-wain would be best. They'll get in a jakes of a mess if they go afoot down to Little Lydford. You know what the road is, even in dry weather."

"*Cæteris paribus*," answered Mr. Churchward thoughtfully.

"Very likely," admitted Taverner, "but, all the same, a hay-wain will be best."

Then it was that Jarratt Weekes allowed his gathering anger to bubble forth in a very acute explosion.

"Why the hell can't you talk English?" he asked the chairman. "I'm sick to death of your bumbling noise. Whenever you don't know what the deuce to answer a man, you fall back on some jargon, that may be Latin, or may be gibberish more likely. You don't know any more than us what your twaddle signifies; but you know we can't laugh at you, and so you're safe to pretend a lot of larning you haven't got. What does *cæteris paribus* mean, anyway?—I ask you that afore this committee, and I will be answered!"

The chairman grew red and blew a heavy blast through his nostrils. Mr. Spry cried out "Shame—shame!"; Mr. Huggins was frightened.

"The committee is adjourned," answered Adam very haughtily. "And for the benefit of those who have so little education, and who envy those who may be better endowed in that respect, I may remark that *cæteris paribus* means—it means, in the manner in which I employed it, that the question of a hay-wain shall be decided at the next meeting. And that is all I have to say, except that I expect an apology."

"And all I have to say is that you won't get one," answered Mr. Weekes very rudely.

The company rose, and a date having been appointed for future deliberations, every man prepared to go on his way.

Jarratt Weekes refused to apologize, despite efforts on the part of Prout and Norseman to make him do so. He persisted in the display of a very ferocious temper, and expressed grave doubt as to whether he should again join the committee. None pressed him to do so.

"A beautiful meeting," said Mr. Huggins to Mr. Taverner, who saw him home. "I'm sure I hope I shall be spared to see many more such afore the great day cometh."

CHAPTER X

'DARLING BLUE-EYES!'

DANIEL BRENDON asked Sarah Jane to marry him on an afternoon in November, when the wind blew like a giant from the west, and the life of the Moor slept.

They sat in a nook of Great Links Tor, looked at the world outspread beneath them, and listened to the hiss of the wind, as it flogged heath and stone and chattering rushes. A million tiny clouds dappled the sky with pure pearl, and far beneath this apparently motionless cloth of silver was woven another cloud-pattern of darker tone, where tattered vapour fled easterly across heaven before the roaring breeze. This rack sank to earth's surface, swept the Moor, and, when it reached the crowns of the land, swallowed them. Thus a world of wild movement and music filled the lower air and throbbed upon the wilderness, while the upper chambers of the sky were bright and still. Some faint sunlight pierced the cirrus, but its radiance was caught by the turmoil below and hardly reached these lovers, where they sat sheltered from the riotous breath of the wind.

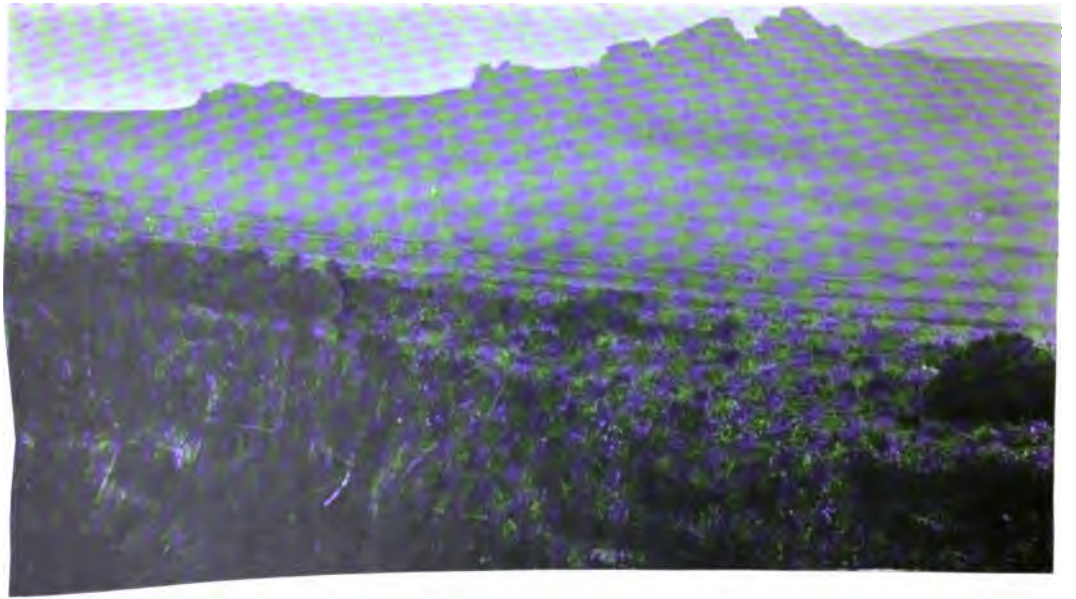
Daniel had asked for a half-holiday, and Sarah met him by appointment in this most lofty, most lonely place.

He had rehearsed his words many times until his brain whirled. By night the statement was clear, and phrases that seemed good to him thronged up from heart to tongue. With day they vanished, and now, on the threshold of the supreme moment, not a shadow of all his fine ideas remained. The wind from the Atlantic swept the last thought away. He sat by her, heaved immense sighs, panted dumb as the stone and heather, fixed his gaze upon her placid face.

"You'm blowing like the wind's self," said Sarah.

"I know I be," he answered. "There's times when I find mouth-speech terrible difficult, and this be one of them."

She knew very well what Daniel must now find words



GREAT LINKS

[*To face p.* 84.

to tell her, but for once love was stronger than herself. When a halting blacksmith had nearly choked with a proposal in the past, she had helped him out of his misery as swiftly as possible, so that there might be little delay before the fatal word fell on his ears; but to-day the case was altered. She enjoyed the discomfort of her dear one's struggle, because her answer must presently make him forget his tribulation, as a warm fire makes us forget battle with the cold air outside.

"You don't talk enough to be very clever at it," she said. "'Tis the little, peart men talk best, like the small birds sing best. You gert big chaps croak like the crows—just now and again. You can't keep it up."

"Very true, I'm sure. But I don't want to croak now, God knows. If I was to put it in shape of a prayer, 'twould come easy, for you'd be surprised how my words slip out then. It loosens the tongue something wonderful to ax God for anything. He helps."

"You don't say your prayers out loud, however—else everybody to Ruddyford would hear 'em—with your gert voice."

"No—I whisper 'em. But no man can pray to anybody but his Maker. So it's cruel difficult."

"Who is it you'm fretting to speak to, then? Be you shamed to do it? Be it an uncomely thing?"

"No, no—'tis a very every-day thing; and yet not that—'tis a—— Would I say anything to you that weren't comely?"

"To me?"

"To you—yes."

"Whatever should you have to say to me?"

"Things as I haven't got the language for. There's words—like 'marriage,' for instance—that be an awful mouthful to spit out. Worse than having a tooth drawed. Yet there's no other word for it."

"And what's the hard word you can't bring yourself to say?"

"Look here—listen. There are some things that I can say, and they'll do for a start. I'm a terrible poor man. I've only got fifty pound stored up, but it goodies and it will be fifty-four ten by next March. I get twenty-five shillings a week; and that's very tidy indeed for me. Yet I'm worth it—not to despise myself—and I've great hopes of getting up higher. You'll think I'm a very own-self man, to keep on about myself so much."

"Not at all. 'Tis cruel interesting."

"Very kind to say so."

"Well, what next?"

"Should you reckon that was a promising case, or maybe you don't?"

"'Tis a very common state of things—save for the fifty-four pounds ten."

"You'd reckon that was to the good, then?"

"Every penny of it."

"It took some saving, Sarah Jane."

"I lay it did, Daniel Brendon."

"And I'm putting by a nice bit every week now."

"So you ought to be. You never know."

There was silence between them, but the wind ceased not. Then she relented and made it easy for him.

"I say you never know; because presently you'll be sure to see a girl that you'll like. No doubt you think not; but you will."

"I have—I have!"

She hardened her heart again.

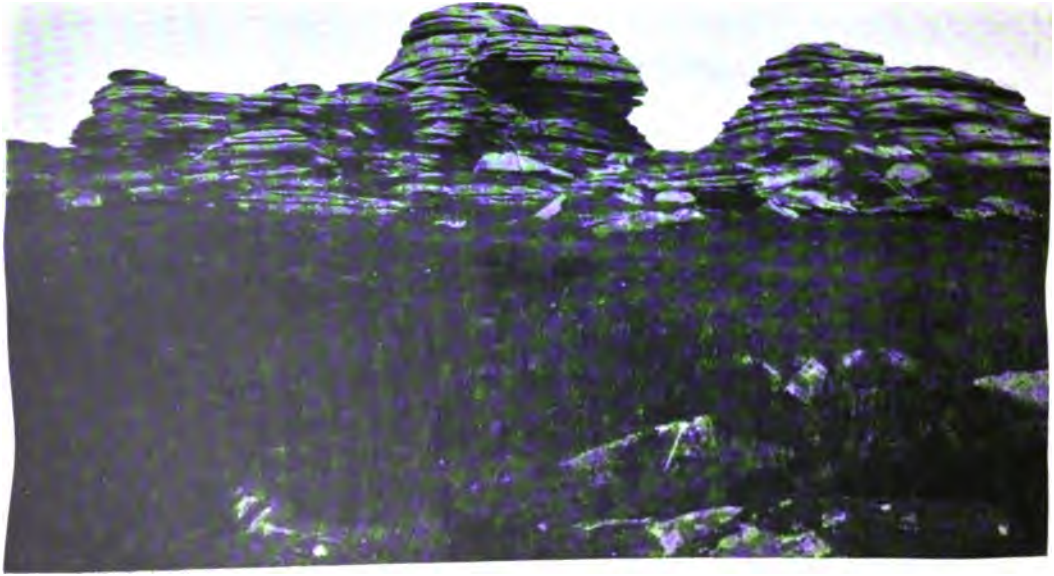
"Ah! So soon? Well, if I may give you advice, you lie low till that fifty's up in three figures. Then—very like she'll take 'e, if nobody better comes in the meantime."

She looked at him and saw his face grow long and his jaw droop.

Then she suddenly threw her arms round him.

"You dear, great monster!" she said.

"Eh—what! Good God!" cried the man; and his



GREAT LINKS. [*To face p.* 80.

emotion heaved up, slow and mighty, like the swing of a wave. He could say nothing; but he kept her face close to his and kissed her pale hair; then his arms tightened round her, and she felt the immense strength of them, and the great uplift of his ribs against her breast.

"I can't let 'e go; I'll never let 'e go again, I do believe," he said at last.

She knew he was unconsciously bruising her white body, but let him hug.

"My darling Blue-eyes!" he cried out, "what have I done to deserve this?"

"Made me love you."

"Think of it—think of it! When did you begin?"

"When did you?"

"First moment that ever I set eyes on you. When I walked down-along, after seeing you and drinking the cider you poured out for me, I knocked my knees against the rocks, like a blind sheep, for I couldn't think of nothing but your lovely hair."

"'Tis too pale. What d'you suppose I said to myself when I seed you first?"

His arm had settled to her waist. She rubbed her ear against his cheek.

"I said, 'I'll get that chap to take off them little funny three-cornered whiskers, if I can. They spoil the greatness of his beautiful, brown face."

"Did you think that—honour bright?"

"Honour bright, I did."

"I'll chop 'em off afore I see you again!"

He kissed her on the mouth.

"I never thought I could be so happy as this, Daniel," she said.

"'Tis almost too much," he admitted. "I doubt if any two was ever heart an' soul together like this afore. Feel me—fire—fire—burning like the bush in the wilderness, and yet not burning away! An' Him up above the clouds—to think it all out for us and plan it so loving and merciful!

Bless God for His great goodness, darling Blue-eyes! This be all His work and His thought."

She showed no religious enthusiasm.

"Leave God till after," she said. "Go on burning now. Love me, hug me. There'll be black and blue bruises on my arms to-morrow."

"I'll make you love God in a way you haven't come to yet, Sarah Jane."

"Don't drag God in now," she said. "Talk to me, cuddle me. Tell me about what we're going to do when we'm married. Think of it all round—the astonishment—the fun. My father first—and then the castle-keeper. He'll have the flesh off your gert bones for this! Talk—talk—hug me tight and talk!"

"I want to think—I want to think," he said.

"Don't," she answered. "Feeling is better than thinking any day."

They lived through an hour as though it had been a moment. They did not feel the gathering dusk; they did not hear the wind. The rain fell presently, and to Sarah it seemed to hiss as it touched Daniel's cheek.

She leapt up at last.

"Now us'll go straight home and tell father."

"To-day—must we?"

"In course. You needn't fear it. It won't surprise him over much."

As they returned, he spoke again of the goodness of his watchful Creator, and moralized upon it.

"He does so much for us—He is sleepless—always watching and thinking for us worms. . . . And what can we do to pay Him? Nothing. We can only thank Him in our hearts every hour of the day."

Sarah Jane was silent a moment—then broke out suddenly.

"I don't want you to fawn on God about me, Daniel."

He started.

"What do you say, my darling dear?"

"Us don't think all alike there. I hate a mean spirit in

a man. Not that you've got one—far, far from that. But I hate even a dog that cringes; and maybe God thinks the same of a man that does."

"Can we cringe to the Almighty?"

"The Giver's more than the gift to you, perhaps?"

"Nought on earth could be more than the gift, and well you know it! But——"

"I've given myself to you. I've done it myself—out of my own heart," she cried almost passionately.

He did not argue the point, but put his arms round her again. Yet he pondered as they passed on to Dunnagoat Cottage; and presently she startled him once more.

Mr. Friend took the news in a spirit very stoical.

"It had to come: 'twas only a question of time. I've always knowed that," he said. "I'm going to bargain for a fair spell of keeping company afore you do the rash deed. You catched fire from each other the first moment you met, I do believe. But sometimes the love that's soon ripe is soon rotten. So you'll just larn a bit about each other and we'll talk of marrying presently, when there's a foundation of understanding and knowledge built up between you."

"I know Dan to the very soul of him," said Sarah Jane. "I've read him day by day like a book of large, easy print; and he knows me—better than I know myself—don't you, Daniel?"

Brendon grinned doubtfully.

"I know you're the best, beautifullest wonder of a woman as ever I met with; and I know that I ban't worthy to tie your shoe-string; and that's about all I do know," he said.

"Exactly so!" declared Gregory. Then he took his daughter's face between his hands and kissed her.

"Bless you, you bowerly maid. You know nought about her, man; and I—her own parent—don't know much more; and she herself—what do she know, but that she's born—and loves you? There's as much we don't know, and she don't know, behind them blue eyes of hers, as there is behind the blue sky. Mark that; an' the Lord bless you,

I'm sure; and if all goes well, I shall be pleased to have you for a son-in-law."

"I hope you'll never get no cause to regret them words, Mr. Friend. And, God helping, I'll be a useful son to you as the years go on."

"That's a very proper thing to say. And if I have any opinion in the matter, 'tis this, that you won't take her too far off from me. She must bide fairly close. She's all I've got, and I couldn't go on without seeing her from time to time."

"That I will promise."

They fell into long silences while Gregory's daughter made tea; then they ate and drank and talked more freely again.

The lovers began to plan daily meetings; and Sarah Jane allowed herself to think deliciously of all the friends to whom this great news must be broken. Daniel remarked that they were mostly of his sex, and remembered that she had told him how her friendships with women were few.

"Every Dick, Tom, and Harry on the country side is to know about it seemingly," he said with a comical expression. "I hope they'll take the hint anyhow, and the less we see of 'em the better henceforward."

Then it was that she astonished him again, and the humorous note was changed abruptly in his mind, though not in hers.

"You men—so greedy you be—like a dog with a bone. 'Tis all or none with you."

He stared. It sounded an unmaidenly speech to his ear.

"By God! I should think so! All or none indeed. We don't share sweethearts, I believe."

She enjoyed his tragical face.

"'Twould be a poor look out for them as tried to come between me an' my gert monster," she said.

"It would be."

"An' for me too, I reckon?"

"Yes," he admitted. "But don't be telling such nonsense—or thinking such folly. You've done with all men

but me for evermore. The Lord help any man or woman who ever came between us in deed or thought, if I catched word of it."

She nodded.

"They'd be dust afore your wrath."

Mr. Friend left them presently and went to a little room on the ground floor of Dunnagoat cot, where he pursued his business of testing peat for tar and gas. He never wearied of this occupation. Then, while Sarah Jane washed up the tea things, Brendon made an excuse to leave her and spoke with his future father-in-law.

"Can 'e lend me a razor, master?" he said.

"A razor? Yes. I don't use 'em of late years, but it happens I've got one. What for? Have you changed your mind and want to cut your throat for being a fool?"

"No, indeed. I've only just begun to live; but she don't like my whiskers."

"Ah! Take 'em off, and she'll want 'e to grow 'em again in a week. Wear a hard hat and she'll order a billy-cock; put on black gaiters and she'll cry out for yellow. God help you, poor giant of a man! You'll hear more about yourself from her fearless lips in the next fortnight, than ever you've found out yet all your life."

"The razor be—where?"

"Up in my sleeping chamber, in a little drawer under the looking-glass."

"Thank you very much, master."

"They'm like the false gods o' the Bible: they think nought of axing the men to gash themselves with knives. The biggest fool of a woman as ever cumbered earth can always be clever at inventing tortures for the men."

"'Tis all very well; but if I take Sarah Jane, you'll have to marry again yourself, Mr. Friend," said Daniel.

"Not me. I had one good one. I drew a prize, though she was always wrong about Amicombe Hill. Ban't in reason to expect two prizes."

Presently Daniel appeared with shaven cheeks before

Sarah Jane. He left her to discover the loss, and she did so in an instant.

"My stars! if it isn't as though you was another man!" she said. "But I wasn't *quite* tired of them all the same. I think I must ax 'e to put on a beard, Dan. I like 'em, because faither's got one."

"I could easy enough; my chin be like a stubble field after I've let him bide a day or two."

"But I couldn't rub my cheek against it while 'twas coming!"

"Better let me go as I am."

"I'll think about that. Be you going to stop to supper?"

"Can't, worse luck. I've promised to be back for a few indoor jobs this evening."

"When shall I see you next?"

"To-morrow night without a doubt. I'll come up over for an hour after supper."

"'Tis a terrible long way up; an' a terrible rough road."

"Not to me—and never has been."

"I love you with every drop of blood in my body, you dear blessed Daniel!"

"Well I know it; but 'tis such an amazing thought, I can't grasp it yet. 'Twill take days, I doubt."

"I've grasped it tight enough! 'Tis the only thing in my head. I've forgot everything else in the world, for there's nought else worth knowing, except you love me."

Thus they prattled at the door. Then a great gust dashed in and blew out the lamp. Brendon had to stop until it was relighted, and they made three more partings. Then Mr. Friend's voice called Sarah Jane, and Brendon set out in earnest for home.

The darkness was full of storm; but his heart made a heaven of night, and the elements that swooped, and shouted, and soaked, were agreeable to Daniel as he plunged into them. They seemed tremendous as his love; and his love made him tremendous as they were. He felt kinship with the lash of the rain and the thrust of the wind. Under-

foot, earth, like a slave, submitted to the torrent and the gale; and he also spurned it even as they did; he feared not its steep and stony miles; he swept forward as strong and fierce as the sky, as joyful as the fetterless forces of the air.

CHAPTER XI

SUSAN BRINGS THE NEWS

On the morning after Daniel's glorious adventure, the girl Susan found it necessary to withdraw from her Aunt Hepsy's unsettled atmosphere and seek the calmer climate of her Aunt Tab. As usual, she appeared about breakfast time on a washing day; and as usual Tabitha expressed much concern and regret. Susan enjoyed a good breakfast, and found herself able to take an important part in the subject of the moment. To those who are familiar with the rustic's sense of humour, it need not be said that the event of that morning was Daniel Brendon's appearance whiskerless. Over night they had not seen him, for a hunger, higher than need of meat or drink, filled the man after his walk with the storm. He had desired no human face to come between him and his thoughts, had done his work by lantern-light in an outhouse, and had then gone to his chamber and there communed with his God. Kneeling, he poured out immense gratitude and thanksgiving; and before the first narrow light of day called him to rise, Brendon had wakened and again devoutly turned his thoughts to the creed that controlled him.

His advent at the breakfast table provoked titters, then guffaws, then questions. Agg first marked the change and thrust his elbow into Joe Tapson's ribs; then Tabitha cocked her thin nose, and John Prout smiled calmly. It was Lethbridge who first dared to approach the subject directly. After Walter Agg had stroked his own cheeks and Tapson subtly inquired what was the price of hair for stuffing pillow-cases, Peter Lethbridge boldly spoke and reminded Dan of a circumstance that he had forgotten. Upon his abstraction at breakfast fell a startling utterance.

"Good Lord, Dan!" cried Lethbridge with great affected concern, "the wind have blowed off your whiskers, my bold hero!"

Then laughter echoed, so that the lamp shook and Mr. Prout ordered silence.

"You'll wake master!" he said. "Can't a man shave his hair as it pleases him, without you zanies making that row?"

"You'm a hardened bachelor, John," said Tapson; "but I know better—eh, Dan'l? Ban't what pleases you, but what pleases her—come now?"

"If she'd axed un to shave his head, the poor soul would have done it—wouldn't you, Dan?" asked Agg.

"I'd forgot 'em," confessed Brendon. "I dare say it looks odd to your silly eyes."

"Did she cut 'em off with her scissors?" inquired Lethbridge, and Tabitha, taking Daniel's side, felt it necessary to reprove him.

"You eat your bacon and don't be too funny, Peter Lethbridge," she said, "else you might hurt yourself."

Brendon's love affair was well known and had already formed matter for mirth.

"You've done wrong, however," declared Tapson. "When Sarah Jane sees that great jowl of thine laid naked as a pig's chap, she'll wish the whiskers back."

"'Tis like as if you got two triangles of white paint upon your cheeks, Mr. Brendon," ventured Susan respectfully.

"You'm a lost man, mark me," continued Joe Tapson. "'Twas a rash act, and you'll rue it yet."

"If you buzzing beetles will let me speak," answered Dan genially, "I'd give 'e a bit of news. There's such a lot on my mind this morning, that I'd quite forgot my whiskers. Well, souls, she'm going to take me, thank God! I axed the question last afternoon and she be of the same mind!"

The woman in Tabitha fluttered to her lips and head. She went over and shook Brendon's hand, and her eyes became a little moist.

"Bravo! Bravo!" said Mr. Prout. "Very glad, I'm sure, though 'tis a shattering thing for a Ruddyford man to want a wife."

"Now he's set the example, these here chaps will be after the maidens, like terriers after rats; you mark me," foretold Joe Tapson.

"Tab," said John Prout, "draw off a quart or so of beer—not cider. 'Tis early, but the thing warrants it. Us'll drink good luck to 'em, an' long life an' a happy fortune."

Dawn already weakened the light of the lamp and made a medley of blue streaks and splashes on the men's faces. Now they neglected their mugs of tea for the more popular beverage, and all drank Daniel's health; while he grinned to his ears and thanked them and shook hands with them.

It was then, when the party had decreased, and Tapson, Agg, and Lethbridge were gone to work, that Susan spoke with the frankness of youth.

"I'm awful surprised, Mr. Brendon," she said, "because to home, where I live, 'tis thought that Jarratt Weekes, my aunt's son, be going to marry Sarah Jane Friend. He thinks so hisself, for that matter."

"He thinks wrong, Susan," answered Daniel. "He offered marriage, but it wasn't to be. Sarah Jane likes me best, though I'm only a poor man. And there's an end of the matter."

"Of course she likes you best—such a whopper as you be! But my cousin, Jarratt, will be awful vexed about it, when he hears."

"I'm sorry for him, I'm sure."

Susan fell into thought, from which her aunt aroused her.

"Now, my dear, you can just put on your bonnet and cloak and march home again. I don't want you to-day. Washing was done yesterday, and I've got to go down to Bridgetstowe; so the sooner you run back to Aunt Hepsy and beg her pardon, the better for you."

"Agg's going to take the cart to Gimmet Hill, and he can drive you a good part of the way," said Mr. Prout.

Susan would have disputed this swift return under ordinary circumstances; but to-day, the richer by great news, she felt rather disposed to go back at once. She did not like Jarratt Weekes; for when, as sometimes happened, he was busy and she had to show visitors over Lydford Castle, he always took every penny of the money from her, even though it exceeded the regulation charge.

"Very well," said Susan. "I'll go along with Mr. Agg; and next time Jar has anything sharp to say to me, I'll give him a stinger!"

"You'll do better to mind your own business," advised her aunt. "The man will hear he's out of luck soon enough, without you telling him."

"Then I should lose the sight of his face," said Susan spitefully. "Him and his mother be so cock-sure that she's going to take him."

"A good few others besides Jarratt Weekes will have to face it," said Tabitha. "There's been a lot after that lovely she for years. They flaxen maidens make the men so silly as sheep. You won't have 'em running after you in a string, Susan, though you grow up never so comely."

"I ban't so sartain of that," said Susan. "I know a chap or two——"

She broke off and picked up her sunbonnet.

"You ban't so bad for fifteen, sure enough," declared John Prout. "Now then, off you go, or else Walter will be away without 'e."

The girl, who had left Lydford at half-past four in the morning, now returned quite cheerfully. As Agg's cart breasted White Hill and presently reached the high road, the sun came out and the weather promised a little peace. It was bright and still after the storm. Some belated Michaelmas daisies yet blossomed in the garden of Philip Weekes; a cat sat at the door in the sun. It recognized Susan and greeted her as she returned. In the rear of the house, clearly to be heard, her aunt's voice sounded shrill. She was talking to a neighbour, and Susan listened, but heard no good of herself.

"The anointed, brazen, shameless trollop—the hussy! the minx! And to think what I've done and suffered for her! The dogs and beasts have more heart in 'em than her. Here be I—toiling day and night to make her a useful creature and teach her the way to grow up decent—and she turns on me, like the little wasp she is, and runs away, as if I was the plague. Let it happen once more—but once—an' so sure as the sun's in the sky, she shall go to the workhouse. 'Tis the evil blood in her veins—the toad. Her mother——"

Here Susan intervened.

"You can call me what you please, Aunt Hepsy," she said. "But don't you go giving my dead mother no names. I wasn't her fault anyway."

"Back again, you saucy maggot! No—poor soul, you wasn't her fault; you was her eternal misfortune—same as you be mine. But don't you think I'm an angel, because I ban't—nothing but an unfortunate, down-trodden old woman. But I won't be rode roughshod over by a black imp like you, and so I tell 'e. You go once again, and God's my judge, you shan't come back. I won't let your shadow over my doorstep no more. You shan't bring my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave, you scourge of a girl!"

She rated, like some harsh-voiced machine that needs oil, and Susan, perfectly accustomed to these explosions, stood silent before her, waiting for a familiar hitch or gasp, that she knew would presently reduce her aunt to temporary silence.

At last it came, just as Philip Weekes appeared from a visit to his poultry.

"This be very serious, Susan," he said. "I really don't know what to think of it. 'Tis a senseless, improper thing to be off like this whenever you be niffed with your aunt—such a woman as she is, too. And—and—how is it you'm back so soon?"

"Because——" began Susan; but Mrs. Weekes was now able to proceed.

"Because your Aunt Tabitha didn't just happen to want 'e, no doubt. As feeble as a mole she is, to have stood it so often. She did ought to have sent you packing with a flea in your ear first time ever you dared to run away, instead of keeping you to help washing. Just like you all—you Prouts and Weekeses—soft stuff—soft stuff—and you'll all go down into the pit together. Lord, He knows where you'd be yourself, Philip Weekes, if it wasn't for me. But even I can't turn putty into starch. Putty you are, and putty you will be till the Day of Doom."

"I comed back, Uncle Philip, because I got hold of a very interesting piece o' news, and I knowed Aunt Hepsy would be very much obliged to me for telling of it," said Susan swiftly.

"Interesting news, indeed! Then you've been listening to other people, I suppose? That's your way. If you'd listen to me, you might get salvation; but never, never—what I say don't matter more than the wind in the hedge. I'm only an old fool that haven't seen the world, and haven't got no wisdom or learning. Of course Aunt Tabitha knows so much better, and of course Uncle John's a good second to Solomon! Well, well, there's times when a broken spirit hungers for the grave and peace. And so I feel more and more when I look at you, Susan."

"All the same, I comed home for nought but to tell you. 'Tis about Sarah Jane. She'm not going to have cousin Jar. She's took another man. I've seen him."

Mrs. Weekes sat down. She dropped so suddenly that her husband was alarmed. Her hand went up to her breast; her eyes grew round.

"Take her away," said Hephzibah feebly; "take that little black-eyed liar away, and get me my peppermint. 'Tis her one delight and plot from daylight till dark to fetch up my spasms; and now she've done it."

"'Tis solemn truth; and I don't want to fetch up your spasms, Gods knows," whimpered Susan. "The man himself told me. He's called Daniel Brendon—a whacker with gert hands, I never see the like. He's shaved off his whiskers for her, and she's taken him. So Jar's out of it."

Mr. Weekes brought his wife her peppermint mixture, and it appeared to have a remarkable effect.

"Out of it! We'll see about that. To throw over Jarratt Weekes for a nameless clod-pole from the middle of the Moor! You just go down to the castle this instant moment and fetch the man to me. The sooner he hears tell of this, the better."

"I shouldn't do it," advised Jarratt's father. "Let her tell him. The blow will fall easier like that. 'Twill cut him up rather cruel."

"Bah!" cried Mrs. Weekes, rising to her feet. "I'd sooner go to a shell-snail for opinions than you. A mouse have got more courage, and a ear-wig more sense. He *shall* hear, and he shall go to this chap and just bid him be off about his business. Why—good angels!—ban't Jarratt and Sarah Jane almost tokened already? Be my son going to give her up now? Not very likely! He's got my courage in his blood, I hope. A fighter I've always been, and always had to be; and I thank God for it every night on my knees. And so should you, you gawkim of a man, for you'd be of no more account than an eft in a pond if it wasn't for me."

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Philip nodded mechanically, as he always did when the torrent roared; then he faded away to his fowls, and Susan went off that she might find her cousin. This task was agreeable to her, for she did not love him. She conveyed her news in as few words as possible, and he stared at her without any words at all. Then presently, with a dark brow, the man came before his mother.

"What's this?" he asked.

"You go and take off them filthy boots and sweep the upper landing," said Aunt Hepsy to Susan, who appeared a few yards behind her son; then, when a broom began to work overhead, she turned to Jarratt.

"Well may you ask! That thankless terror of a child runned off to Ruddyford again last night; and there she heard it. The man be called Daniel Brendon—some labourer lately took on by Woodrow. But 'tis for you to stop it if you're my son. I lay I'd put a spoke in their wheel double quick! All the same, the woman's not worth it—a gert, good-for-nought, gallivanting giglet as she is!"

"A pretty poor compliment to me, if it's true," he said.

"Very likely it isn't true at all. Still, it's your job. Only think twice. There's the schoolmaster's darter be worth twenty of Sarah Jane."

"Couldn't stand her voice, mother—nor yet her temper."

"More fool you. Give me a voice and a temper, too, if you want to get on in the world. 'Tis the gentle sort, as twitters like birds and be frightened to hurt a fly, as always go down. Let people hear your voice and feel your temper; then they'll respect you and you'll keep up your end of the stick. Them as be so sweet as sugar, mostly melt like sugar in the hard business of life."

"One thing I know, afore God, and that is, if she takes any man but me, I'll be revenged on her and him, if it costs my last farthing."

"What's the sense of that talk? If you'm set on her still, have her willy-nilly. Do anything inside honesty. Ride off with her! Break the man's stupid head for him!

All the same, that's not sense, but only passion. My advice may be nought; but it is just this: that you bide along with your mother for the present, and wait for a better maiden to turn up."

"That woman could have done pretty well anything she liked with me."

"I hope not. What foolishness! You think so now. You wouldn't have thought so a week beyond your honeymonth. Well, 'tis for you to go forward. The very sort of job I should have liked, if I'd been a man."

"I'll have it out with the chap."

"Better have it out with her. And yet, perhaps, you'm right. Tell him to his face she'm yours, and tokened to 'e. Stir him up; or, if you find he's that sort, pay him off. Twenty pounds would go an awful long way with a man. 'Tis far easier for such a chap to get a girl to walk with him than put by twenty pounds into the saving's bank."

"A likely idea," said Jarratt. "Such a fellow wouldn't know what love means, same as an educated man like me. I dare say if I was to put it into pounds, shillings, and pence, he'd meet me like a lamb."

Mrs. Weekes almost regretted giving her son advice that looked so promising. Now, she did not wish him to marry Sarah Jane; she did not wish him to marry at all; but since he seemed set upon the step, her desire turned to the schoolmaster's daughter as a woman of character, who would also have three figures for her dowry.

"When all's said, I could wish you would think of Mary."

"Not I," answered her son. "I saw a touch of Mary after that committee meeting at her father's. The place was pretty full of baccy smoke and beer reek, certainly; and she didn't say nothing—not a word—when she looked in at the finish; but there was an expression on her face that made me almost sorry for Churchward after we'd gone, though he is the biggest, emptiest old fool in Lydford."

"A silly, blown-up man! I like to stab his ideas with

a word, and let the wind out. But his daughter's not so chuckle-headed. She'd make a tidy wife."

"Not for me. I'll fight yet for Sarah Jane. And any stick's good enough to beat a dog."

Mrs. Weekes, however, hesitated before this sentiment.

"Fight fair, Jar," she said. "Don't let it be told of my son that he didn't go to work honest and above-board. No—no, I never would believe it. Mrs. Swain often says to me that whatever faults I may have—and who hasn't?—yet I speak home to the truth, good market or bad, and never deceive the youngest child as comes with a penny, or the simplest fool who would buy a fowl without feeling it. Be straight. You must be straight, for there's not a crooked drop of blood in your veins. You know all about your mother's family, and as for your father's—rag of a man though he is—I will say of Philip Weekes that he never departs from uprightness by a hair. Often, in my most spirited moments, when I've poured the bitter truth into his ear, like a river, half the night long, your father have agreed to every word, and thanked me for throwing such light on his character."

"I shan't offer the man twenty to begin with," he said. "I may choke him off for less. I ban't angry with him: I'm angry with her for listening to him, or allowing herself to know such trash."

"And I'll help where I get the chance, be sure of that. Your good's my good. If I can catch Sarah Jane some day, I'll drop a word in season."

"Don't," he said. "You keep out of it till I tell you. I'll ax you soon enough to lend a hand if the time comes when you can be useful."

CHAPTER XII

THE PRICE OF SARAH JANE

THE air was heavy with unshed rain, and the Moor reeked after past storms of night, as Jarratt rode over Lyd river and breasted the slopes of Bra Tor. A boy on a pony followed him, and two dogs brought up the rear. Mr. Weekes was come to drive some colts off their pastures; and, being doubtful, to a few miles, where they might be found, he had made an early start. Great clouds hid the summits of the land, and water shone in pools or fell in rivulets on every side.

Then it was that, passing through the mediæval ruins of old enterprise, where once Elizabethan miners streamed the Moor for tin, the keeper of Lydford Castle suddenly found himself face to face with a man much in his thoughts of late. Though he had never seen Brendon until that hour, he recognized him instantly by reason of his great size. Daniel was walking up the hill with his face towards the peat-works, and he carried a message from Mr. Woodrow to Gregory Friend.

"Good-morning!" shouted Jarratt, and the pedestrian stopped. Soon Weekes was beside him and had leisure to note his rival. The great brown face, square jaw, dog-like eyes and immense physical strength of the man were all noted in a searching glance; and he also saw what pleased him little: that Brendon was better dressed, cleaner, and smarter every way than a common hind.

"Have you seen my colts this way, neighbour?" he asked. "They're ear-marked with red worsted."

"Then I met with them only yesterday. There's a grey mare in foal along with them."

"That's right."

"You'll find 'em down in the strolls on this side Rattle-brook for certain."

"Much obliged to you."

Weekes shouted to his boy, directed the road, and told him to proceed and wait by the river until he himself should follow. Then he turned again to Brendon.

"You're not a Lydford man, are you?"

"No. I belong to Ruddyford—down-along. I'm just going up to the peat-works with a message. You'll be Mr. Jarratt Weekes, I suppose?"

"Jarratt Weekes is my name. And what's yours?"

"Daniel Brendon."

"Ah! you're not easily forgot. I suppose you don't know of anybody who wants a horse? This one I'm riding is for sale."

Brendon found Mr. Weekes walking slowly up the hill beside him. His pulse quickened. He guessed that the other meant to speak of matters more personal presently, for it had come to his ears that Jarratt Weekes publicly refused to give up Sarah Jane. Agg brought news from Lydford how Weekes had said in the bar of the Castle Inn that he was engaged to Gregory Friend's daughter, and would punish any man who denied it.

"A good horse seemingly. Have 'e asked my master, Mr. Woodrow? He's only waiting to be tempted, I believe."

"A good horse, as you say; but he won't carry beer," explained Jarratt Weekes. "Not that I ever want him to do so; but he's always nervous of the dark. Old farmer Routleigh used to have him; then, coming home market-merry from Okehampton, he got into trouble and was left in the hedge. I like the horse very well, but he's barely up to my weight. He'd suit Woodrow exactly, I should judge."

"I'll mention the matter to him."

"Thank you, Brendon. Brendon was it you said, or Brandon?"

"Brendon's my name."

"Lucky I met you, then, for I've wanted to have a say with you for some time."

Daniel did not answer.

"Look here, now—between men there need be no beating about the bush. That's women's way. And a woman I want to talk about. In Lydford they are mentioning the name of a Daniel Brendon with that of Miss Friend, who lives up here for the present at Dunnagoat Cottage with her father."

The other's face hardened, and a heavy look came into his eyes; but he did not speak.

"That's not as it should be," continued Jarratt Weekes. "It gets about, and then there's wrong ideas in the air. Living up here, the girl can't hear it or contradict it. But 'tis a very unmaidenly thing for her to be talked over like that, and, frankly, I don't much like it, Brendon."

Still Daniel preserved silence. His heart was beating hard; he felt anger running in his veins and his jaws fastening on each other. But he made no answer. Instead he stopped, slowly drew his pipe and a tobacco-pouch from his pocket, and prepared to smoke.

"Buckets more rain be coming," he said presently, looking at the sky.

"Don't change the subject, please. Answer my question."

"I don't know you'd asked one."

"You're wasting time to pretend ignorance. Say what you've got to say. I've a perfect reason and right to speak to you on this delicate matter, and everybody well knows it—but yourself apparently. Now speak."

"You had better finish telling first," answered Daniel. "To me you appear to be on a wild goose chase altogether, and talking no better than silly rummage. Why are you so busy about Sarah Jane Friend? Tell me that, and then 'twill be time for me to talk to you. Let's have your reason and right you mention, if you please, Mr. Weekes."

"My reason and right is that I am going to marry her myself. We are engaged. Everybody knows that very well. And nobody better than Sarah Jane Friend. It happens that I've been exceedingly busy lately—too busy to

be quite so lover-like as I ought. So she's been amusing herself by drawing you on. But 'tis beyond a joke now, and I'll have no more of it, or I'll speak to your master."

"Ah!" said the other, "that's the sort of man you are, then? My girl was wise to throw you over, and your dirty money too. Tokened to you, you liar! I wonder the hand of God don't drive you into the dust for saying it! Tokened to you—when you know so well as I do that, last Sunday week, she told you, once for all, she wasn't going to take you? What d'you think me and she are? A pair of fools to go down afore your brazen voice?"

"You'd better not have me for an enemy, my man. It won't pay you in the long run, I promise you."

"Bluster's a fine weapon—to back a lie; but truth can stand without it. You've told me a string of lies, and well you knew they were."

He lighted his pipe, and Weekes laughed.

"Well, well, you're a smart man, I find. I'll give you that credit. You see pretty far through a millstone—eh? If you won't knock under to me, then we'll start again, and put it on a business footing. I want no misunderstanding with you. This girl thinks she's fond of you for the moment. I'll grant that much. But you'll see, if you really care a button about her, that her prosperity would be a good deal surer with me than with you. You needn't be angry at all. This is a matter of business. I want her. I've known her—long, long before ever you did; and if you hadn't turned up from God knows where, she'd have come to me right and proper when I decided I was ready for her. I am ready for her now. If I'd asked her a month sooner, she'd have come without question, of course; but meanwhile she had seen you, and was taken, like a child, with your size. So it stands. I grant that you've got the whip hand for the minute. You have me in your power up to any reasonable sum. It lies in a nutshell, Daniel Brendon. What's your figure?"

"For chucking her?"

"For leaving her alone to come to her senses. Money's not got every day; a wife can be. If you want the last, there's no better way to get 'em than with the first."

"Yet Sarah Jane put me afore your cash seemingly?"

"Like any foolish girl might in a rash moment. But you're not a fool, or I'm no judge of character. You're a man of ideas and ambitions. I thought you were a common labourer. That's what made me rather savage. I see you're a man as good as myself—every bit. So I'll forgive Sarah that much, and appeal to your sense of justice to give me back my own. And since I know well enough you will be making a great sacrifice, I offer you an equivalent."

Daniel listened.

"A generous chap you are, then?"

"Yes, I am. I don't want to exert force, or trust to my position. I meet you man to man equal. I've long been as good as tokened to her, and it would be a very wicked thing for you to come between us. I'll not say you have no rights, however; I'll not say that a silly woman's passing whim isn't to count. I'll grant everything—everything in reason. I'll allow that you won her fair and square, though she didn't tell you quite the truth, I'm afraid. I'll allow that for the moment she honestly thinks that she loves you better than she loves me. But, beyond all that, there's these two points. I'll offer you good money to drop this, as in justice to me you should do at once; and I'll say that if you want Sarah Jane to be happy and content and prosperous, you must see that I'm the man to make her so—not you."

"That's your side, then?"

"Yes; that's my side—the side of justice and wisdom, if you come to think of it."

"And what's the figure? I'm a poor man, and oughtn't to lose a chance of making good money, Mr. Weekes. 'Tis the opportunity of a lifetime, you see. 'Twill never come again."

"Well, I'm no skinflint. Give her up and I'll let you have ten pounds."

"Ten pounds! That's an awful lot!"

"A lot of money, as you say."

"But not enough for Sarah Jane."

Weekes held the battle as good as won, and now determined to fight for the lowest figure possible. He was rather astonished to succeed so easily, and from great anxiety leapt quickly over to the other extreme of contempt.

"You're greedy, I'm afraid."

"No, no—not greedy, only businesslike. I won her fairly, you see. Us can't all go uphill, like you. Some stands still; some goes down. Here's my chance to go up a little."

"I'll make it fifteen, then."

"'Tis for me to make the figure now, and for you to pay it. I suppose the question is what's Sarah Jane Friend worth to you?"

"Not at all," answered Jarratt. "That's neither here nor there. All I want to know is what money you'll drop her for. And I warn you not to be too greedy, else I may get rusty on my side and take her by force for nothing."

"I see; I must be reasonable?"

"Of course—give and take in business."

"Well, then, suppose we say—a hundred million pounds?"

"Don't be a fool," answered the other testily. "I'm not talking to you for fun."

Then Daniel's temper burst from control.

"God damn you, you ugly, cross-eyed cur! To dare to come to a man and offer ten pounds to him for his woman! You flint-faced wretch!—a withered thing like you to think of her! I——"

"You'd better——" began Weekes; but Brendon roared him down.

"Shut your mouth! 'Tis your turn now to hear me! If you dare to speak again, I'll pull you off your horse and

take the skin from your bones! What dirt d'you think I'm made of, to tell this wickedness in my ears? I wonder you ban't struck for it. Ten pounds for Sarah Jane; and you sit there on your horse under Heaven and nothing done against you! But it won't be forgot—remember that. 'Tis a black mark upon your name for evermore. Ten pounds; and you ought to be damned ten times over for every shilling of it! And if ever you come anigh her again, I'll break your neck, God's my judge! A man as she's said 'No' to a dozen times! Go and hang yourself, you grey rat! She wouldn't have you if you was made of gold, and well you know it. To say as I came between you! To say she'd be a happier woman along with you than with me! Happy with you—as reckon she'm worth ten pounds! There—get away after your ponies, and never you look into her face or mine again, or I'll knock your two eyes into one—so now you know!"

He strode on up the hill, panting and raging like a bull, while Weekes looked after him. Jarratt had turned very grey under this torrent of abuse. He was stung by the other's scorn, and felt that he did not deserve it. But he kept his wits, and perceived that Brendon, huge and loutish though he might be, had proved too clever for him in this matter. The lover of Sarah Jane had trapped Mr. Weekes by a pretended greed, and led him into folly. He realized that probably the world in general, and Sarah Jane in particular, would presently hear that he had offered a ten-pound note for her; and then raised the figure reluctantly to fifteen. This was not likely to advance his reputation at Lydford, or elsewhere. He even imagined the school-boys shouting vulgar remarks after him along the public way.

Now he sat still on his horse for full five minutes. Then he rode after Brendon and overtook him.

"Only one word," he said. "Forget this. I didn't understand you. I'll interfere with you no more. You were right, and I was wrong. As you are victorious, be

generous. Don't let my folly go further. We all make mistakes. I have erred, Mr. Brendon, and I regret it."

Brendon regarded Jarratt doubtfully. The giant still panted with his anger, and steam rolled out from his mouth in puffs upon the wet, dark air.

"'Tis human to err; 'tis human to forgive. I was wrong—very wrong. I own it. Who can do more? We've all got our weak places, and money is mine. Let them without sin cast the first stone. Remember what I must feel to lose Sarah Jane."

This last stroke answered its purpose, and Brendon relented very slowly.

"I know well enough what that must be."

"Be generous then to a desperate man. Hide up this that I have told you. The sum is nothing. I knew well enough you wouldn't take ten—or ten thousand. In sober honesty I'm much poorer than folk think, though I pretend to be warm. Anyway, I ask you to pardon me for insulting you, and to keep this talk secret—even from her. No man likes his mistakes blazed out for the people to scoff at. Do as you'd be done by in this—that's all I ask."

He pleaded better than he knew, for the victor already regretted his own coarse language.

"Let it be, then," answered Brendon. "Go your way, and I'll go mine; and not a word of this will pass my lips. We was both wrong—you to think of such a vile thing, and me to curse you. 'Twas all fair, and you had first say to her; but she likes me best, so there's no more to be said."

"I'll abide by that," answered Jarratt Weekes. Then he turned his horse's head and rode away, with Care behind him, and such a load of hatred in his heart that it seemed to poison his blood and choke him physically. He gasped, and the evil words of Daniel Brendon—uttered with passion—were as thistledown to the thoughts that now bred within the brain of his enemy. A violent lust for revenge grew up in the soul of Jarratt Weekes from that hour; but

Brendon, for his part, quickly repented of the things that he had said; displayed a victor's magnanimity; felt something of the other's tragic and eternal loss; and found it in his heart to sorrow for him.

Daniel also mourned for himself and his mighty lapse of temper and self-control. That night he prayed to be pardoned; he trembled to consider where his sudden rages might some day lead him; he thanked his Saviour for unutterable blessings, and implored that a greater patience, humility, and gentleness might be added to his character. He called also upon Heaven to sustain Jarratt Weekes under this shattering stroke, and begged that it might presently be put in his power to do the disappointed man some service.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

FIRST BLOOD TO BRENDON

In the struggle between Daniel Brendon and Jarratt Weekes, circumstances combined to strengthen the former's cause at every point. Right, as a matter of fact, was on his side, but what promised to be a greater source of strength, he found in Sarah Jane. The ingenuous and fearless character of his betrothed and her intrepid handling of truth, albeit embarrassing enough at times, made her strong against enemies of the type of Jarratt Weekes. Moreover, the lovers had many friends; the castle-keeper, few. His mother tried to help him; but she was honest and her shifts proved absolutely futile. She could only suggest that Jarratt should see Sarah Jane and argue with her the folly of such action. She herself invited Gregory Friend's daughter to tea, and used what powers of persuasion she possessed to turn the girl. She also saw Mr. Friend, and showed him the advantages of a union with the Weekes family. Her attacks were direct and straightforward; therefore they failed. Neither did Jarratt's more tortuous methods win him any advantage. He worked what little harm he could, but it amounted to nothing. Daniel's record was clean; he had a reputation for sober-mindedness; no man could tax him with wrong-doing. To separate him from Sarah Jane at any cost became the castle-keeper's problem; but, while achieving this deed, it was vital that

the woman's regard for Jarratt should be increased rather than lessened; and the double task proved altogether beyond Jarratt's power.

He trusted that Hilary Woodrow might prove an obstacle, and that marriage must at least mean dismissal from Ruddyford; but even here his hopes were disappointed. Matters combined at the farm largely to advance Daniel Brendon's ambition, and a tower of strength appeared in a quarter from which little might have been hoped. Tabitha Prout smiled upon the match, first from kindness of heart, secondly to gain private ends. Another woman at Ruddyford had long been her desire. She sounded Brendon first, then finding that he approved, approached her master. The person most vitally involved in Tabitha's plot was her own brother; but she knew that John would make no difficulties, and therefore left him until the last.

"Does your maiden know anything about milk and butter?" she asked Daniel, on an occasion when they were alone.

"Can't say she does; but there's nothing she couldn't learn in a few months—quick as light at learning she is," he answered.

Then Tabitha proposed that Sarah Jane on her marriage should come to Ruddyford as dairymaid.

"As things go," she explained, "'tis all sixes and sevens; and now the boy milks, and now Tapson do, and there's no proper system to it. But with our cows, few though they be, a dairymaid ought to be kept; and she'd help me here and there—I expect that. And if she comes, we ought to keep three more cows, if not four. I only want to know if you be willing. 'Tis worth your while, for if that was planned, you could bide here after you're married and wouldn't have to look round again."

"Too good to be true, Tabitha Prout; yet none the less a great thought; and I lay you'd find Sarah Jane your right hand if she did come. But where could us bide?"

"That's easy enough. The difficulty is with Mr. Wood-

row. However, I'll have a tell with him and put my grey hairs and increasing age as strong as I can. I'm overworked without a doubt. This place has suffered from lack of females for years, and I won't have no more boys, so I've got to do it all—save for the messy, silly help you men give. But there 'tis: with his hate of 'em, I doubt if he'd stand a young woman about the place."

"I wonder. Make a point of the extra cows, Tabitha. That might win him; and as for Sarah Jane, by the time we'm married, I'll promise for her that she knows the whole craft of milk and cream and butter near so well as you do."

But Tabitha would not allow that.

"In time—in time. She won't have my hand to butter in six months, Daniel—perhaps not in six years. Butter-making's born with a woman. But I'll teach her so much as she can learn. Not that anybody ever taught me—save nature and my own wits."

Joe Tapson entered at this moment, knew not of the argument, but heard Tabitha's self-praise and sneered at her. They often wrangled hotly about the relative powers of the sexes; for while Tapson was a cynic touching womankind, Tabitha declared that she had seen too much of men in her life to have any admiration left for them.

"'Tis about Sarah Jane and work," explained Miss Prout.

"Work?" he said. "What about work? Let her do her proper married woman's work and get boys—plenty of 'em—eh, Daniel?"

Tabitha sniffed scorn upon him.

"Always the way with you vainglorious creatures. 'For us to be mothers and get boys'—the conceit of it! As if there was nothing else for a woman to do beside that!"

"Nothing—except get girls," said Joe bluntly. "There's nought else in the world that men can't do a darned sight better than females. Don't you deceive yourself there. Why, look around—even to cooking and sewing; tailors and men-cooks beat you out of the field, when first-class work

has to be done. You work hard enough—too hard even in your way; yet the likes of you—to say it in a perfectly kindly spirit—don't really do much more than cumber the earth. Women be wanted for the next generation—not for this one. Their work lies there; and when you talk about the value in the world of all you frost-bitten virgins, I'm bound to tell you, without feeling, that 'tis only in your own imagination."

"You speak like the withered stump of a married man you are," she answered indignantly. "I blush for you—you to lecture me! 'Tis a good thing you've no finger in the next generation, I'm sure; and I lay the happiest moment in your wife's life was the last."

But Joe had not finished. He smiled at her temper and spoke again.

"Why, my dear soul, after the business of child-bearing's done, you ban't so much use as cows; for they do give us milk; but such as you yield nought but vinegar."

"What things to say!" exclaimed Daniel; "who ever heard the like?"

"Truth's truth; and the sharp truth about women none knows better than me. But all the same——"

"Shut your mouth and get out of my kitchen," cried Tabitha. "What woman could be blamed for treating you harsh? To insult the whole of us—a poisonous, one-eyed rat like you!"

"A one-eyed rat I may be," retorted Joe; "but I can bite, and 'tis easy to see the force of my words by the heat of your temper. You hate men, and I hate women, so all's said."

The question to be answered was Hilary Woodrow's attitude towards the suggestion of Sarah Jane as dairymaid. He had heard that Brendon was going to be married, and supposed that the giant would leave Ruddyford upon that event. But he cared little whether Daniel went or stopped. The problem of labour on a Dartmoor farm was far less acute fifty years ago than at present, and the master knew

that Daniel's place might easily be filled. He listened to Tabitha's arguments but withheld judgment until he had consulted his head man. John Prout, however, approved, and himself disposed of the only difficulty attaching to the plan.

"I think very well of it," he said, "and to show how well, I'll help by coming to live here, and letting Brendon have my cottage. That makes all clear. She's a very nice, strong maiden, and Tabitha's right when she says we want another woman about the place. There's too much on her shoulders now. You'll do well to let it be so, master; and then the girl can set about learning her work straight away and be useful from the start."

Thus the matter fell out, to Sarah Jane's delight; and her father was also well pleased, because his daughter would henceforth dwell close to him. The woman asked for no assistance or advice in the conduct of her life henceforth. Her object was swiftly to master the business of the dairy, and to that end, after conversation with Tabitha Prout, she went to Lydford and saw Mrs. Weekes. Whether Hephzibah could be expected to serve her, Sarah Jane never stopped to consider. Nobody knew more about the local dairy-farmers than the wife of Philip Weekes; nobody therefore was better able to help Gregory Friend's daughter, if she chose to do so. But Hephzibah apparently did not choose.

"To have the face to come to me! 'Tis enough to make angels weep tears of blood, Sarah Jane," she said. "You throw over the best men in Lydford and go your own wild, headlong way to misery; and let me waste torrents of advice upon you; and then walk in, as if nothing was the matter in the world, and ax me to get you a larner's place along with cows! What you'll come to, be hid with your Maker, for no human can guess it. Never was such a saucy wench seen or heard of. You'll be asking me for a wedding present next, I suppose."

"Don't see no reason why not," said Sarah Jane. "I

can't marry two men, I believe; and I love one and don't care a rush for t'other, so there's an end to it. Because you wanted for me to take Jarratt and I ban't going to—that's no reason why you shouldn't do me a kindness."

"Loramercy! you talk just like a man. If you don't carry a heart under your ribs, I do. You wait till you've got a proper son as hankers after a girl, and she won't have him—then we'll see how 'tis. Don't you never ax me for the price of a shoe-lace to keep you from the union workhouse, Sarah Jane, because you won't get it."

Sarah laughed pleasantly.

"For all you scream out at everybody, like a cat when his tail's trod on, you're my sort, Mrs. Weekes. You say what you think—though you may think wrong as often as anybody."

"You'm an outrageous baggage," said Hephzibah, "and I won't bandy no more words with you. Not a hand—not a finger will I lift to help such a thankless fool of a woman. Go to Mrs. Perkins at Little Lydford, and get out of my sight, else I'll put my ten commandants on your face!"

Thus, despite her ferocity and terrible threats, Mrs. Weekes told Sarah Jane exactly what she wanted to know; and Hephzibah knew that she had done so, and scorned herself in secret for a silly fool. But her nature could not choose but like Sarah Jane. In secret she loved all fearless things. Therefore, while hating the girl because she would not take Jarratt, Mrs. Weekes had to admire her because she was herself.

The work that Sarah Jane wanted was found for her, and during the next three months she disappeared from Amicombe Hill. Sometimes on Sundays, however, she visited her father. She worked as hard as she possibly could, proved an apt pupil, made new friends at her temporary home in Lew Trenchard, and saw Daniel Brendon now and then. She also wrote to him and her father.

Meantime her betrothed planned his future, calculated

the cost of new furniture for Mr. Prout's cottage, and made himself very useful to that large-hearted man.

John Prout was quite content to return to the farm and live under the same roof as his master. For some reasons he relished the change, since it would now be easier to devote a little more personal attention to Hilary. He could see no faults in him; he pandered to Woodrow's lethargic nature as far as he was able; he stuck stoutly to it that the farmer was not a robust man and must be considered in every way possible.

The time sped and Winter returned. Then Sarah Jane, her education with regard to milk and butter complete, came home, and Daniel began to clamour for marriage. Mr. Friend finally decided that the season of Spring should be chosen. For himself he had planned to live henceforth in a little building at the peat-works. He held that a few slates and stones, some mortar and a pail of whitewash, would render it habitable. An engineer had paid one of his rare, periodic visits to the works, made some suggestions and departed again. Therefore Gregory was full of new hopes. There had also come increasing demands for Amicombe peat from various sources, and he was very busy with a trolly on the old tram-line. He loaded it from his stores, then steered it down the winding ways of the Moor, discharged his fuel near the railway station, and, with one strong horse to drag the trolly, climbed back again to his boggy fastness behind Great Links.

The banns were called at Lydford, and Sarah Jane and Daniel listened to them. He burnt under his brown skin; she betrayed interest, but no visible embarrassment.

At this season Jarratt Weekes was much occupied by business, into which he plunged somewhat deeply as a distraction. Widow Routleigh passed away, and it was known that her cottage had been purchased by the castle-keeper; but circumstances suspended the operations on the water-leat, and its advent at Lydford became delayed by a year. Therefore the advantages accruing to his new property were

not yet patent to every eye, and only Jarratt and his mother knew the real quality of his bargain. In other directions he had obliged his enemy Mr. Churchward with a loan, because an opportunity arose for putting "the Infant," Adam's son, into business. William Churchward joined a bookseller in Tavistock. The occupation, as his father explained, was genteel and intellectual, and might lead to higher things. From William's point of view his work was sedentary and slight, and led to hearty thirst after the shutters were put up. He lived with his senior partner, pursued his efforts at picture-painting, and often came home at the end of the week.

No further meeting to discuss the water-leat celebrations had been called after the postponement was announced. But Mr. Churchward only waited a fitting time to proceed with his plans. The committee was understood to continue to exist, and Mr. Nathaniel Spry still flattered the schoolmaster; Mr. Norseman still went in doubt as to the propriety of the enterprise; Mr. Pearn still talked about his free luncheon; and Mr. Huggins still laboured under the thought of impersonating Moses.

Then came the wedding day and the wedding ceremony. Save for the master, Ruddyford was empty, because all asked and obtained leave to see Daniel married. Dunnagoat cot was not large enough to hold the wedding guests, and its inaccessible position made it impossible in any case. Therefore Mr Friend, who insisted on straining his resources to the extent of a banquet, borrowed an empty cottage near the church, and with the assistance of Mr. Pearn and his staff, arranged a very handsome entertainment.

There were present the company from Ruddyford; and Mr. Churchward and his daughter also accepted Gregory's hospitality; for Mary Churchward and Sarah Jane were old acquaintance, and Mary, in secret, had liked Sarah Jane the more for refusing Jarratt Weekes. Mr. Huggins, Mr. Norseman and the latter's wife also attended; and five or

six other men and women, with their grown-up sons and daughters, completed a throng of about twenty persons. Many more came to the church ceremony, and all frankly agreed that such a splendid man and woman had not within living memory been linked at St. Petrock's. But the house of Weekes was unrepresented, save by Susan. She had taken occasion to run away at dawn; and she thoroughly enjoyed the great event, without any uneasiness as to the future. Her aunt would be far too interested at learning all particulars, to waste time in reproaches and admonishment.

So Daniel Brendon and Sarah Jane Friend were wedded, and, having spent a week in Plymouth and watched the wonder of the sea, they returned to their little home at Ruddyford and joyfully set about the business of life.

CHAPTER II

THE GATES OF THE MORNING

Dawn had woven her own texture of pearl into the fabric of the Moor, and the sun, like a great lamp, hung low upon the shoulder of the eastern hills. Silence brooded, save for the murmur of water, and all things were still but the stream, upon whose restless currents morning wrote in letters of pale gold. The world glimmered under sparkling moisture born of a starry night, and every blade of grass and frond of fern lifted its proper jewel to the sun. Peace held the waking hour a while, and living man still slept as

soundly as the old stone heroes in their forgotten graves beneath the heather. Then newborn things began to suck the udder, or open little bills for food. Parent birds and beasts were busy tending upon their young. The plovers mewed far off, and swooped and tumbled; curlews cried; herons took the morning upon their wings and swept low and heavily to their hunting grounds.

Young dawn danced golden-footed over the stony hills, fired the greater gorse, lighted each granite pinnacle like a torch, flooded the world with radiance, and drank the dew of the morning. Earth also awoke, and her sleeping garb of pearly mist, still spread upon the river valleys, at length dwindled, and glowed, and burnt away into the ardent air. Then incense of peat-smoke ascended in a transparent veil of blue above Ruddyford, while from the cot hard by came forth a woman.

Sarah Jane had been at her new life a week, and began to know the cows and their characters. They waited for her now, and soon the milk purred into her glittering pails. First the note of the can was sharp and thin; then, as the precious fluid spirted, now right, now left, from the teats under Sarah's firm fingers, the vessel uttered a milder harmony and finally gave out only a dull thud with each addition. The cows waited their turns patiently, licked one another's necks and lowed; as yet no man moved, and the milker amused herself by talking to the kine. She sat with her cheek pressed to a great red flank, and her hair shone cowslip-colour against the russet hide of the beast. Her splendid arms were bare to the elbow. Already something of the past had vanished from her, and in her eyes new thought was added to the old frankness. She thought upon motherhood as she milked these placid mothers; she perceived that the summer world was full of mothers wheeling the air and walking on earth. Wifehood was good to her, and very dearly she loved the man who had led her into it.

Sarah Jane whistled sometimes when she felt unusually

cheerful. She whistled now, and her red lips creased up till they resembled the breaking bud of a flower. The sounds she uttered were deep and full, like a blackbird's song, and they made no set tune, but rippled in harmonious, sweet, irregular notes, as an accompaniment to kindred thoughts.

Suddenly feet fell on the stone pavement outside the cow-byres, and a man approached where she sat and milked the last cow. The others, each in turn, her store yielded, had passed through an open gate into the Moor, there to browse and repose and chew the cud until another evening.

Sarah Jane glanced up and saw Hilary Woodrow standing and looking at her. As yet she had but seen him once upon a formal introduction; now he stopped and spoke to her.

"Good morning, Mrs. Brendon. I hope your house is comfortable, and that you are settling down. Let Tabitha know if she can do anything for you."

"Good-morning, sir, and thank you. 'Tis a very snug li'l house, and nothing could be nicer."

He nodded. Then the last cow went off, and Sarah Jane rose, patted it on the flank and stretched her arms. He remarked her height and splendid figure.

"Rather cramping work, I'm afraid," he said.

"'Twas at first, but I like it better now. Cows be nice, cosy creatures an' terrible understanding. Some's so peaceful an' quiet; an' others that masterful they won't take 'no' for an answer, an' push afore the patient ones and get their own way, and will be milked first."

He nodded once more and smiled. Then she washed her hands in a granite trough of sweet water and spoke again.

"You'm moving early," she remarked, in her easy and friendly fashion. "John Prout said you always laid late for health, yet you be up afore the men."

"I slept badly and was glad to get out into this sun."

"You'm over-thin seemingly, and have a hungry look, sir. Here—wait a minute! Bide where you be, and I'll come back afore you can count ten!"

She vanished into Ruddyford, and Hilary, wondering,

watched her swift, splendid speed. In a moment she returned with an empty glass. She filled it from the milk-pail and held it to him.

"Drink," she said. "'Tis what you'm calling out for."

"I can't, Mrs. Brendon—raw milk doesn't suit me."

"Don't you believe that! Milk hot out of the cow suits everybody. Take it so, and you'll get rounder and happier in a week. My own father was largely the better for it. Try, sir; do please."

He could not resist her eyes, and took the glass from her hands and thanked her.

"Here's good luck and all prosperity to you and your husband," he said, and emptied the glass.

Her face brightened with pleasure.

"Lick your lips," she begged. "Don't lose a drop of it: 'tis life—milk's the very beginning of life—so my mother used to tell."

"And do you think this cup is the beginning of mine?"

"No—yours beginned fifty year ago by the look of you. But milk will help you. You're just the thin, poor-fed fashion of man as ought to drink it. My Daniel's different. With his huge thews he must have red meat—like a dear old tiger. Milk's no use to him."

"By Jove—d'you think I look fifty, Mrs. Brendon?" he asked.

"To my eye, I should guess you wasn't much under. Beg pardon, I'm sure, if you be."

"I'm thirty-six," he said.

"My stars! Then you ought to take more care of yourself."

"I sleep badly."

"You think too much belike?"

"Yes—there's a lot to think about."

"You did ought to put a bit of wool round your neck when you come out in the morning air, perhaps," she suggested; but he laughed at this.

"Good gracious! I'm not made of sugar. I look a giant

of strength beside town folk. 'Tis only in your eye that all of us seem weaklings beside Brendon. To tell you the truth, I'm rather a fool about my health. I said just now I had so much to think about: don't you believe it! I've got nothing to think about—hardly more than the cows. Now, I mustn't waste any more of your time."

He sauntered on towards the Moor.

Daniel Brendon was standing at his entrance as Woodrow approached, and he touched his hat and said—

"Morning, sir!"

"Morning, Dan," the master answered and passed on.

Sarah Jane took her milk-pails to the dairy, and then went home to breakfast. She chattered to her husband, narrated her morning's experience, and explained at length her theories of Hilary Woodrow.

"To think as he be no more than six-and-thirty!" she said.

"How d'you know that?"

"He told me. I forget how it went, but I'd just said I reckoned he was fifty, and he seemed rather troubled."

"Fancy your speaking like that!"

"He don't look much less, all the same. And I gave him a bit of advice too."

"Advise him! Nought stops you," Daniel said with his mouth full.

"Why should it? After you've been married a month —there 'tis—you've got more wisdom and understanding of menfolk than a century of maiden life could bring to 'e. I feel like a mother to these here helpless men a'ready."

"Never was such a large-hearted female as you, Sarah Jane."

"What that man wants is a wife. I couldn't have read him any more than you could a bit ago; now 'tis as plain to my understanding as this cup of tea. A wisht, hang-dog, sorrowful face to my eye; yet very good-looking in his thin way. But hungry—awful hungry."

"As to women, he's had enough of them. One treated

him shameful. But 'tisn't them: 'tis his terrible vain ideas about religion makes him fretful, I reckon. Well he may be hungry!"

"Don't you believe that," she answered. "Church-going don't put fat on the bones, whatever else it may do. He should have a female after him, to fuss a bit, and coddle him, and see he lets his proper food down. He wants somebody to listen to his talk—somebody to sharpen his wits on."

With startling intuition of truth she spoke; but Daniel did not appreciate her discernment.

"Fewer that listen to his talk, the better," he said. "Ban't likely Mr. Woodrow will be happy so long as he sucks poison out of all sorts of godless books."

"Poison is as poison does," she answered. "Everybody says he's a very good sort of man. The good man can't be godless."

"Because his Maker's stronger than his opinions and ban't sleeping, though Woodrow's conscience may be. In time of trouble I wouldn't give a rush for his way. There's nought to help then but Heaven; and so he'll find it. Not that I judge—only I'm sorry for it."

"He wants a woman after him," repeated Sarah Jane decisively.

Daniel laughed at her.

"You think, because you and me are married, that no body can be happy otherwise."

"Men and women must come to it for sartain, if they'm to be complete, and shine afore their fellow-creatures. A bachelor's an unfinished thing; and so's a maiden—I don't care who she is. And she knows it at the bottom of her heart, for all she pretends different."

"That's not Christianity," Daniel answered; "and you oughtn't to say it, or think it. You speak in the first flush of being married; and I feel just the same and scorn a single man; but 'tis silly nonsense, and we'm both wrong. The saints and martyrs was mostly single, and the holiest

Christians that ever lived haven't found no use for women as a rule. Christ's Self wasn't married for that matter."

She considered this view, then shook her head unconvinced.

"He went to marriages and was kind to the women. He might have found the right maiden Himself, and won joy of her after He'd set the world right, if they hadn't killed Him."

Daniel stared.

"Don't say things like that, Sarah Jane! You don't mean it for profane speaking; but 'tis very near it, and makes me feel awful scared."

"What have I said now, dear heart? I never know what you think 'bout things. You change so. If 'tis holier and better to bide single—but there—what foolishness! Jesus Christ set store by little children anyway; and He knowed you can't have 'em without getting 'em."

Brendon rose up from the table and kissed her neck.

"You'm a darling creature," he said, "and to look at you be to make single life but a frosty thing in a man's eyes, no doubt. Certainly 'twould be false for me to say a word against marriage; only it ban't for all; and the Christian religion shows that there are many can do more useful work out of it than in it."

"Poor things!" she said in her pride. "Let 'em do what they can, then. But I'd be sorry to think that a churchyard stone, getting crookeder every year, was all that was left to remember me by when I went."

"That's your narrowness, Sarah. There's other contrivances beside babbies that a man or a woman can bring into the world. Goodness and proper actions, and setting an example, and such like."

"Parson's work," she said. "What's that to taking your share in the little ones? If I thought us should have no childer, I'd so soon hang myself as not, Dan."

"Your ideas do hurtle about my ears like hail," he said. "And they'm awful wild and silly sometimes."

"I know it. You'll larn me better come presently."

"I hope so," he said. "You're all right at heart—only the pattern of your ideas now and then be a thought too outlandish for a Christian home. You wasn't taught all you've got to larn. I don't say it out of no disrespect to father; but—well—us all have a deal to larn yet—the oldest and youngest—and me most of all."

Daniel heaved a contented sigh upon this platitude, and his day's work began.

CHAPTER III

PROGRESS IN IDEAS

The Brendons always went to morning service at Lydford on Sunday. Sometimes Mr. Tapson, who was a churchman, accompanied them; but Agg and Lethbridge belonged to another sect, and their place of worship was at Mary Tavy. Neither John Prout nor his sister ever went. Indeed, Sunday dinner occupied the great part of Tabitha's energies on every seventh day.

Once, being early for service, Daniel and Sarah Jane wandered amid the tombs, and then sat down upon the churchyard wall and looked out over a wooded gorge beneath. Brendon was always very serious and sober on Sunday. It seemed to his wife that he donned a mental habit with his black coat, and in her heart she rejoiced when the day had passed. He looked strictly after her religion from the time of their marriage, and had lengthened her

morning and evening prayers considerably with additions from his own. She fell in readily with his wishes, and was obedient as a child; but none the less she knew that the inward and spiritual signs he foretold from her increased religious activity, delayed their appearance. The daily act of faith was not necessary to her mental health, and it proved powerless to alter her natural bent of thought. Sometimes she still shocked him, but less often than of old.

She loved him with a great love; and love taught her to understand his stern soul a little. Not fear, but affection, made her careful. Meantime her own attitude to life and her own frank and joyous spirit were absolutely unchanged. Only, from consideration for him, she hid her thought a little, and often shut her mouth upon an opinion, because she remembered that it might give him pain.

"Do you ever think about the graves?" asked her husband, looking round thoughtfully at the grass-clad hillocks. But she kept her eyes before her and only shook her head.

"No, Dan—can't say as I do. The churchyard's the place for dead men—not living ones. Us shall spend a terrible lot of time here come presently, and I don't want to waste much of it here now."

"'Tis a steadying job to read the verses above all these bones," he said.

"Read 'em, then," she answered. "But don't ax me to. I hate graves, and I hate everything to do with death. With all my might I hate it."

"You shouldn't feel so. 'Tis a part of life, and no more can we have life without it, than we can have a book without a last page. And no one of all these men carried anything into the next world but his record in this. Yet to remember how soon we must give up our clay be a solemn, useful thought."

She did not answer, and he strolled apart and considered the trite warnings, pious hopes, and implicit pathos of dates, where figures often told the saddest tale.

A man came into the churchyard, and, looking round, Daniel, very greatly to his astonishment, saw Jarratt Weekes talking to his wife. Scarcely believing his own eyes, he strode over a row of the silent people and approached.

Neither his wife nor himself had spoken to the castle-keeper since their marriage; yet at last it seemed that the rejected suitor was recovering from his disappointment and about to forget and forgive the past. Weekes shook hands with Brendon, as he had already done with Sarah Jane; then he addressed them both.

"I'm hoping as you'll let bygones be bygones, Brendon. I was hard hit, and—well, 'tis no good going over old ground. I did my best to get you away from Sarah Jane here, and I failed. There's no more to be said."

"Except that you didn't fight fair," answered Daniel calmly. "You tried by very underhand ways to do me out of my own, and I'm sorry for it. All the same, I'm willing enough to forgive you and be friendly henceforth, Mr. Weekes."

"So am I," declared Sarah Jane. "'Twas a very great kindness in you to be so fond of me, and I never shall forget it. But there was but one man in the world for me after I met Daniel here, and so I hope there won't be no more feeling against us."

"Not on my side there won't," answered Jarratt. "I'm glad to let it go. Life's too short to harbour any bitterness like that. I hope you'll be happy all your days, and if ever I can serve you, Brendon, you've only got to tell me so."

Daniel glowed with satisfaction, took the other's hand again and shook it.

"This is an extra good Sunday for me," he answered, "and nothing better could have happened. And I'll say no more, except that I trust it may come into my power to do you good some day, Mr. Weekes. Which I will do, God helping."

"So be it," said the other. "I'll hold you friendly in my mind, henceforward—both of you."

He did not look at Brendon during this conversation, but sometimes cast a side glance into Sarah Jane's face. Now folk began to enter the churchyard, and presently the bells rang.

During service Brendon very heartily thanked Heaven for this happy event, and blessed his Maker, in that He had touched the angry heart of Jarratt Weekes to penitence. But Sarah Jane regarded the incident with a spirit less than prayerful. She was hardly convinced that her old lover meant friendship henceforth. She knew what he had attempted against Daniel; she remembered the things that he had said to her; and this sudden change of mind and expression of contrition found her sceptical.

As for Weekes himself, he had acted upon impulse and the accident of meeting them alone. But his motives were involved. He was not yet done with Sarah Jane. He rather wished to punish her, since he could not possess her. He certainly had not forgiven, and still desired revenge. Therefore he pretended a sudden regret, deceived Brendon, and so ordered his apologies that henceforth he might pose as a friend. He had, however, little thought of what he would do, and revenge was by no means the dominating idea of his mind at present. Much else occupied it, and so busy was he, that he knew quite well nothing practical might ever spring from his secret dislike of the Brendons. Time might even deaden the animosity, before opportunity arose to gratify it; but, on the other hand, with free intercourse once established, anything might fall out. So he left the situation vague for chance to develop. His malignancy was chronic rather than acute. It might leap into activity by the accident of events; or perish, smothered under the press of his affairs.

As they returned home from church, Sarah Jane warned her husband to place no absolute trust in the things that he had heard from Jarratt Weekes; but Daniel blamed her

for doubting. He explained that Mr. Weekes was a Christian man and a regular attendant at worship. He felt positive that the other was truly contrite, and out of his own nature accepted these assurances without suspicion. He went further, and blamed his wife for her doubt.

"You mustn't be small like that," he said. "It isn't worthy of you."

"I know him better than you do. He was very much in love with me. He offered me a horse if I'd have him. That was pretty good for such a mean man as him."

"You must always allow for the part that God plays in a person. When anybody says or does a thing outside his character, don't jump to the idea he's lying or playing a part. But just ask yourself if God may not have touched the man and lifted him higher than himself."

"You can't be higher than yourself—so Mr. Woodrow says. I forget what we was telling about, but, coming for his milk one morning, he got very serious and full of religious ideas."

Daniel frowned.

"There's no true foundation to his opinions—always remember that."

"He's just as religious as you, in his own way, all the same," she said. "He told me religion be like clothes. If it fits, well and good; but 'tis no good trying to tinker and patch up the Bible to make it suit your case if it won't. I dimly see what the man means."

"Do you?—well, I don't, and I don't want to; and I won't have him talk to you so; I ban't too pleased at this caper of his, to come out every morning for a glass of warm milk when you'm with the cows."

"And of an evening too, he comes."

"It must be stopped, then. He shall talk no more of his loose opinions to you. 'Tinker and patch the Bible'! What will he say next? Sometimes I feel a doubt if I did ought to bide here at all. I'm not sure if one should be

working and taking the money of a man's that not a Christian."

"He's a good man enough. I've heard you say yourself that you never met a better."

"I know it. And that's the mystery. I hope he'll come round and see truth as the years pass by."

"He's the better for the milk, and a kinder creature never walked," said Sarah Jane.

In truth she had seen a good deal of Hilary Woodrow since first he strolled abroad after a sleepless night and drank at her bidding. It pleased him to find her at her work, for she was always the first to be stirring; and now he had fallen into the way of rising early, walking in the air, and talking with the dairymaid while she milked the cows.

Sarah Jane, in some small measure, appeared to have revived his faith and interest in women. Her artless outlook upon life came as a novelty to him. Everything interested her; nothing shocked her. An almost sexless purity of mind characterized her speeches. An idea entering her brain came forth again chastened and sweetened. Her very plainness of speech made for purgation of thought. The things called "doubtful" were disinfected when she spoke about them.

Hilary Woodrow found Daniel's wife not seldom in his head, and as time advanced he grew to anticipate the dawn with pleasure, and looked forward to the fresh milk of her thoughts, rather than that she brought him from the cow.

He protested sometimes at the narrowness of the opinions round about, and told her, with gloomy triumph, that certain local ministers of the church declined to know him.

"Which is best," he asked, "to say that every man is born wicked, as they do, or say that every man is born good, like I do? Why, 'tis to condemn without a trial to say that every man is born wicked."

"Men be born little, dear, dinky babbies," she said—"no more wicked than they blind kittens in the loft."

"Of course not; but that's dogma. They find it in the

Bible. It's called the Fall. I can't talk to the men about these things—except Prout. But I wish I could get at your husband a bit, because he's in earnest. The fault with earnest folk so often is, that they never will understand other people are earnest too."

"He knows you'm very good, sir, for all your opinions."

"You see, conscience and the moral sense are two different things; but Brendon would never allow that. He says that conscience comes from God. I say it is what you've been taught, or learned for yourself. If I believed in God—then I'd say the moral sense was what came direct from Him. But I don't, and so I explain it by the laws of Evolution."

She shook her head.

"That's all a rigmarole to me, though I dare say Dan would follow it. You don't believe in no God at all, then?"

"None at all—not the shadow of the shade of a God."

In her blue eyes nothing but the sky was reflected; in his there was much of earth; and his own earth was unrestful as he looked at her morning loveliness.

"Drink your milk afore the warmth be out of it," she said. "'Twould be a terrible curious thing if there was no God, certainly."

"The sun's my God."

"Well, then, there is a God—though we don't see overmuch of Him up here."

"But we believe in him, and trust him with the seed, and the lambs; and know that he'll bring back Spring again when Winter is done. So, after all, I'm talking nonsense, because I've got as great faith in my god as your husband has in his."

"To hear you run on! Like a book, I'm sure."

"I can talk like this to you, because you don't look at me as if I was damned and you weren't sorry for it. That's what I get from most people. Have you ever read about Jehovah and the burnt offerings and the sin offerings, and how His altar was to be sprinkled with fresh blood all day

long, and how the dumb beasts and birds were to be torn to pieces for a sweet savour before Him? That's the blood-sucking vampire the parsons think made the stars, and the flowers, and—you! I wish I'd lived a hundred years later: then I shouldn't have been fretted with so many fools, Sarah Jane."

"Us ought to live and let live, I suppose."

"Charity—that's all I ask. I only want 'em to practise the first and last thing their Lord begged for, and preached for, and prayed for."

"You'm very charitable, I'm sure—and never name the kind things you do—though John Prout tells about them."

"Does he? No, no, they're in his imagination. Prout spoils me and thinks too well of me. So do you."

"I'm sorry for you, because you've got such a lot of queer opinions, seemingly, and none to let 'em off upon. You must feel like bursting with trouble sometimes, from the look of your eyes."

He laughed at that and abruptly left her. It was his custom now to appear and depart without any formal salute. Sometimes, after absence of days, he would suddenly be at her side after dawn, or at evening. Then he would resume the thread of his last speeches, as though no interval had fallen between.

There was no secrecy in these interviews, and often another, or Brendon himself, might be present at them. But when once Woodrow appealed to Daniel, before his wife, to be larger-minded and more tolerant, the giant shook his head. He held it wickedness to be easy with wrong ideas. To him that man was dishonest, who had not the courage of his own opinions; and disloyal, who could even endure arguments directed against his faith.

CHAPTER IV

SATURDAY NIGHT

After heavy rain the evening cleared awhile and the sky showed palest blue, touched with little clouds that carried the sunset fire. But banks of mist already began to roll up with night, and their vans, as they billowed along the south, were touched with rose. Darkness swiftly followed; the world faded away under a cold fog, that increased in density until all things were hidden and smothered by it. Into the valleys it rolled, swept croft and heath and the channels of the rivers, sank into the deep lanes, searched the woods, spread darker than night upon the lowlands. Outside the Castle Inn it hung like wool, and across it, from the windows of the bar, streamed out radiance of genial light. But this illumination was choked within a dozen yards of its starting point; and, if a door was opened, the fog crept in with the visitor.

Men appeared to take their familiar parts in the drinking and talking of Saturday night, and each made a similar comment on the unusual density of the mist, each rubbed the dewy rime from his hair as he entered.

"If it freezes 'pon this, us shall have a proper sight of ammil in the trees to-morrow," said Mr. Jacob Taverner, who was of the company. "I haven't seen that wonder for ten years now; but well I can mind it. 'Twas a day soon after the beginning of the New Year—even as this might be; and us rose up to find every twig and bough, and stone and fuzz bush coated with pure ice, like glass. The sun played upon the country, and never such a dazzle was seen. 'Twas like a fairy story—all the world turned to gold and precious gems a-glittering. As Huggins said, it might have been the New Jerusalem itself, if it hadn't been so plaguey cold along with. Didn't you, Val?"

"I did say so—I remember them words," answered Mr. Huggins from his corner. "Cold enough to freeze the bird on the bough 'twas. I hope it won't never go so chill again, while I'm spared, for 'twould carry me off without a doubt."

"You'll live to play Moses an' walk along with St. Petrock yet," said Mr. Pearn slily.

Mr. Huggins always became uneasy when Moses was mentioned; and this his friends well knew.

"I wish the water had run to Lydford when 'twas first planned. This putting off for a year be very improper in my opinion," declared Taverner; and Mr. Adam Churchward, from his snug seat behind a leathern screen near the fire, replied:

"We can't honestly throw the blame on anybody, Jacob. You see, they were suddenly confronted with some engineering difficulties in getting the water over the railway cutting. 'Tis not as easy as they thought to do it. And then there was another trouble in that hollow full of springs under the Tavistock road. But I have no hesitation in saying, after my recent conversation with the deputy assistant engineer, that the water will be here definitely by June next, or Autumn at latest."

"Will you call up another committee then?" asked Mr. Huggins.

"Certainly I shall. Spry wrote out the minutes of the last meeting, and will be able to refresh your minds as to what was proposed and seconded all in form and order."

"How's 'the Infant' faring to Tavistock?" asked Mr. Pearn. "I was offered five shilling for that there little picture of the Castle he made a while back, and give me for a bad debt. It hangs over your head, Huggins."

Mr. Churchward was familiar with the sketch, and nodded.

"Yes, he has the artist's instinct. He colours still, I believe, and has sold one or two little trifles at Tavistock. He doesn't take to the book business, I find. If we could but get a patron for him—somebody to send him to London

free of expense to develop the possibilities of art. But patrons are things of the past."

"Else you would be in a higher sphere yourself, no doubt, schoolmaster."

"Thank you, Taverner. But I am quite content. *Multum in parvo*, as we say. I get much into little. I hope the rising generation will show that I have done my duty, if not more than my duty."

"Be they a very on-coming lot, or thick-headed?" inquired Mr. Huggins. "I often think if us old men had had such chances to larn as the boys nowadays, that we should have made a stir in the nation. Anyway, we stood to work in a fashion I never see of late years. Hard as nails we used to be. Now—my stars! you'll see the childer going to school under umbrellas! 'Tis a great sign of weakness in my opinion, and ought to be stopped."

"As to the main question," answered Adam, "my youthful charges may be considered rather under than over the average in their intellects. With the exception of Johnny Williams and his brother Arthur, I should say my present classes will leave the world pretty much as they find it. I need not tell you that I inculcate high moral principles; and in that respect they are as good and honest a lot of boys as Lydford has ever turned out—or any other centre of instruction. But as to book learning—no."

"Too many school treats and holidays, in my opinion," said Jarratt Weekes.

He had just entered, and was shaking himself like a dog that emerges from the water.

"Hold on!" cried Jacob Taverner. "What be about?"

Weekes took off his coat and flung it on a settle.

"The usual," he said to Mr. Pearn, and, while his drink was being poured, turned to the schoolmaster.

"'Tis all of a piece—the softness of the times," he said. "You larn boys to be lazy to school. I don't say it specially of your school. 'Tis the same at all of 'em. Look at your own son."

"You mustn't say that," answered Adam. "I cannot suffer it. You ought to remember that the average of human brain power is exceedingly low. I am always against putting too much strain on the human mind on principle. Our lunatic asylums are the result of putting too much strain—not only on the mind, but on the body. It should be the object of every schoolmaster to feel that, come what may, no pupil of his shall ever be sent to a lunatic asylum or to prison. That has always been my object, at any rate; and without self-praise I may say that I have achieved it, except in the case of Thomas Drury, the Saltash murderer."

"We're a canting lot of humbugs," said Weekes shortly. "We think more of the fools of to-day than the wise men of to-morrow."

"Quite right too," declared Mr. Pearn. "They want it more. The wise men coming will think for themselves; the fools can't."

"Yes; they'll think for themselves, and laugh at us," said Jarratt.

"Let 'em laugh," said Mr. Huggins. "Who cares? We shall be underground, in other Hands than theirs. We shall answer to God A'mighty for our works, not to the unborn."

"The unborn will judge us all the same—Weekes is right there," admitted the schoolmaster. "I always feel the truth of that when I lift my rod. I say to myself, 'this erring child will some day be a father. I am therefore not only teaching him to keep the narrow road, but helping his children and his grandchildren to do so.' As I wield the instrument of correction *in extremis*, I often think that I may be moulding the character of some great man, who will not draw his first breath until long after I am dust. This may seem merely the imagination of the scholarly mind, yet so it is. Take your next with me, Weekes. I always like our conversation to be raised to a high pitch; and you always do it."

Of late, to gain some private ends, Mr. Churchward had resolutely ignored the ill-will of the castle-keeper. Jarratt continued to treat him indifferently; but Adam would never allow himself to be annoyed, and always offered the cheek to the smiter. Everybody perceived this change of attitude, and everybody, including Mr. Churchward's daughter, knew the reason.

Mr. Weekes nodded and his glass was filled again.

"I hope your mother be having good trade?" asked Noah Pearn. "I hear that the Christmas markets touched high water this year."

"All we could wish," admitted Jarratt. "She's worked like ten women this winter."

"Very aggravating 'tis to hear it—to me," suddenly declared a sad-looking, silent man, in a corner. "There's my wife might be doing the very same; but rabbit it! she've never got time for nothing now. We've gived up our market stall altogether. I've got to do everything of late days. I never thought she'd have changed like that—else I'd never have took her."

"How many children have you got, Samuel?" asked Mr. Huggins.

"But one," said Samuel gloomily.

"There 'tis!" cried the ancient. "They'm all the same with one—'tis the commonest thing. But wait till she've brought 'e half-a-dozen or more, and she'll have time for everything—market included."

"'Tis strange but true, like other ways of Providence," declared Taverner; "but I've marked it in my own family, that one child be far more trouble than six; an' takes far more time. 'Tis the want of practice, no doubt."

Men came and went. Presently Weekes prepared to depart, and put on his coat again.

"Where's my father to-night?" he asked. "'Tis past his hour. He had rather a dressing down afore mother started this morning. I should have thought he'd have come for an extra glass in consequence."

"He never takes but four half pints of a Saturday night, year in, year out," answered Mr. Pearn. "Sometimes he'll top up with a thimble of sloe gin, if the weather's harsh; but that's his outside allowance."

"Life's a stormy voyage—without no harbour—for him," said Huggins. "I don't speak disrespectfully of Mrs. Weekes—very far from it—she's a born wonder; but one of the sort built for wild weather. She likes it; she'd droop if everything went smooth."

"Everything do go smooth," said Jarratt.

"She is like a stately vessel that casts up foam from its prow," declared the schoolmaster. "Mrs. Weekes is a lesson to Lydford, as I have always maintained, and always shall do."

The husband of the stately vessel appeared at this moment.

"Be blessed if I didn't miss the door," he said. "Never remember such a fog. 'Twill be blind man's buff to-morrow."

He sighed and came to the fire.

"Have a drink, father," said Jarratt, as to an inferior. But Philip shook his head.

"Not yet, Jar, thank 'e. I must get a thought warmer first. I'll smoke my pipe a bit."

"Down on his luck he is to-day," explained the younger Weekes. "Down on his luck—because he don't know his luck—eh, father?"

Philip did not answer; conversation became general, and the castle-keeper departed.

Then, when he had gone, Noah Pearn endeavoured to cheer his customer.

"Us have got some hot ale here wi' a nutmeg and a bit 'o toast in it, my dear," he said. "You sup a drop and 'twill brace your sinews. The cold have touched 'e perhaps."

"Thank you, Noah," said Mr. Weekes, and took the glass. "You're very good, I'm sure. I've had a lot on my mind to-day."

"She'd be a fine woman, if there was a thought less lemon in her," said Taverner soothingly.

"She is a fine woman," answered Mr. Weekes, "—fine enough for anything; but fine weather's no good if you'm bedridden, and a fine woman's no good to her husband if she won't—however, us needn't wash our dirty linen in public. We've all our defects."

"Almost too high-spirited, if I may venture to say so," declared Mr. Churchward. "She has the courage of the masculine gender."

"So have I, if I was let bide," explained Philip. "That's the mischief of it. If I'd been a sort of weak man, ready to go under, and do woman's work, and play second fiddle happily, it wouldn't have mattered; but I ban't at all that sort of man by nature, and it hurts my feelings to be made to do it."

"I'm sure you'm too wise to rebel, however," said Mr. Huggins. "'Twas much the same with me, and often I wish I'd been so sensible as you; but my manly spirit wouldn't brook nothing of that sort. 'I won't have it!' I used to say in my fierce way. But I'm sorry now, because she might have been alive yet if I'd been a thought easier with her."

Noah Pearn winked behind the back of Mr. Huggins at the company generally, for it was well remembered that Valentine's vanished partner had ruled him with a rod of iron.

Mr. Weekes, however, showed no amusement. In his mind he was retracing certain painful recent incidents.

"Take what fell out this very day at morn," he said, "to show how rash and wilful Mrs. Weekes can be of a Saturday. I was down in the garden attending to a thing or two and packing a pair of birds for our own hamper. Suddenly she came out of the house and began. 'Twas all about Mrs. Swain, of course, and how I never can send two birds of the same size, and how my goings-on will ruin our custom and spoil business and fetch us to the poor-house

in our old age. She was in full swing, souls, when down comes Susan from the kitchen, running as if the dowl was arter her. 'Oh, Aunt Hepsy!' she begins. Then her aunt cut her short, and told her not to dare open her silly mouth while she was talking. So Susan stood still and the missis went on at me. I was a greedy Gubbins, and a traitor, and a wolf in sheep's clothing, and a lot of other things; I was a reed shaken with the wind, a know-nought gert mumphead, and suchlike. Then, after ten minutes of it, I should think, she turned to Susan, and asked what she'd got to say. The toad of a girl grinned in our faces and said 'twas of no consequence, only a gert strange dog, with a bit of broken rope round his neck, had got into the kitchen and put his paws on the table and growled at her, like a bear, and showed all his teeth at once. Well—there 'twas—you can guess what the room looked like when I runned in. The dog—I know whose dog 'twas well enough!—had done just what he damn pleased. He only made off when he heard me coming, and a muck heap's a neat, orderly place to what that kitchen was after he'd gone. Everything off the table, for he'd got over the crockery to the bacon and swept the tea-pot and things afore him like a river sweeps straws—bread, milk, dripping—everything. Never you seed such a masterpiece! I lost my presence of mind and turned on the missis and said, 'There—that's your work'! Let that be a lesson to you, you chattering woman!' I oughtn't to have said it, and I was sorry enough after; but God He knows 'twill be weeks afore I get in a word edgewise again. She had her spasms first; then she come to and let me catch it hot and strong from the shoulder, I promise you. She never stopped. While I drove her to the station, and shut the carriage door on her, and the guard he whistled and the train went, 'twas one shattering volume of speech. However, I needn't trouble other people. We've all got our cares, no doubt."

They expressed sympathy with Philip's difficulties, and

Adam Churchward especially dwelt upon the bright side. He reminded Mr. Weekes of the noble character of his son, and explained that we all have the defects of our qualities, and must give and take in a large and understanding spirit, if we are to reach happiness, despite the adverse circumstance of being human creatures.

These kindly words and his third glass of warm beer and nutmeg comforted Philip; while the fourth and last found him resigned even to the verge of renewed cheerfulness.

"Take my advice and say the word in season first minute you see her to-morrow," said Mr. Pearn. "Then, if the market's been good, 'twill come all right."

"I will do so," promised Philip. "That reminds me: I must take a box o' straw to the station, for she was going to fetch home a new tea-pot and a good few other things with her. 'Twill all come right, and I dare say, after all, 'twasn't a bad thing that I forgot myself and put my foot down so resolute. She may think on it after."

"She will," foretold Jacob Taverner. "Be sure she'll think on it, and think none the worse of you for it. They like the manhood to flash out of us now and again—even the most managing sort."

Closing time had come, and with great exclamations at the density of the fog, Mr. Pearn's guests departed to their homes.

CHAPTER V

VISIT TO A HERMIT

THE evidences of former humanity that abound upon Dartmoor may be divided into remains prehistoric and mediæval. Amid the first shall be found the ruins of the stone-man's home and the scattered foundations of his lodges and encampments. To him also belong certain cirques of stone lifted here and there in lonely places, together with parallelitha, or avenues, and those menhirs and cairns that rise solitary upon high hills to mark the sleeping-places of neolithic heroes. Profound antiquity wraps up these memorials, and the significance of their record is still matter of antiquarian doubt. To what purpose was erected the hypæthral chamber and the long aisle of stone, may never now be understood; but later entries in the granite cartulary of Dartmoor are more easily deciphered. From the middle ages date the tin-streamers' works, where Tudor miners laboured; and scarce a river valley shall be searched without offering many evidences of their toil; while upon the higher grounds, marking some spot of special note, indicating boundaries or serving as guide-posts from goal to goal, the old stone crosses stand.

It was significant of the different attitudes of Sarah Jane and her husband that she found a measure of interest in the pagan hut-circle or grave; he only cared to see the chance symbol of his faith. These Christian evidences were rare round about Ruddyford, but marks of the old stone men did not lack, and Sarah Jane, to whom Hilary Woodrow had once explained their meaning, always professed active interest in these fragments, and told the things that she had heard concerning them to her husband.

There came a Sunday in March when the Brendons went

up to see Gregory Friend, that they might convey a great piece of news to him. The young heather was rusty-red in the shoot, and here and there swaling fires had scorched the bosom of the hills to blackness. The day was wintry, yet clear, but many snug spots offered among the boulders, where one might sit facing the sun and sheltered from the east wind.

Such a place Brendon presently found and bade his wife rest awhile.

"'Tis another of them hut-circles master tells about," said Sarah Jane. "That was where the door opened without a doubt. To think as folk lived here, Dan—thousands and thousands of years ago!"

"Poor dust! I like the crosses better: they be nearer to our own time, I suppose, and mean a comfortabler thing. 'Tis wisht to hear farmer tell how savage, skin-clad folk dwelt here afore the coming of Christ."

"They couldn't help coming afore He did. He ought to have come sooner, if He wanted for them to know about Him," she answered.

Brendon frowned.

"You'm always so defiant," he said. "I still catch the master's way of speech in your tongue now and again An' very ugly it sounds."

"I'm bound to stop and listen to him sometimes, when he begins to talk. But since he comed of a morning for his glass of milk and you stopped it—or I told him I'd rather he didn't—us have had no words about holy things. He's got a side all the same."

"I'm sorry to hear you say so. If you say so, you think so, no doubt."

Sarah Jane laughed.

"'Tis a free country—as far as thoughts be the matter."

"That's him again. I heard him say the only sort of freedom we could have was freedom of thought. But unbelievers shouldn't have that if I could help it."

She looked at him with love rather than respect.

"You'm deep but not wide in your way of thinking. I mind once last autumn coming to you and marking as you'd been trampling in the whortleberries. Your boots was all red and purple, and it looked for all the world as if you might have been stamping somebody to death."

"What things you say!"

"All the same now, be honest, Daniel—couldn't you do it? Can't you feel that things might happen so bad that you'd even kill a person? There's death in your eyes sometimes, when you talk of evildoers, and them that are cruel to children, and suchlike."

"'Tisn't a wifely thing to remind me I've got a temper. You've never had to regret it, anyway."

"How do you know that? But 'tis true: I never have. You're a deal too soft with me, bless your big heart. I can't do wrong in your eyes; and yet, sometimes, I wonder how you'd take it if I did do wrong—such wrong as there could be no doubt about. There's some things you'd kill me for, I do believe."

"You'm talking to a Christian man; but you don't seem to know it."

"A man be a man—Christian or heathen. Things do happen to men sometimes, and their religion don't make any more difference then to what they do than the hat on their heads. Quite right, too. I like to think there's a bit of metal in you. Sometimes I almost wish you'd make me feel it, when I startle you and say my silly speeches."

"How can I be angry with such speeches as yours? They'm silly enough only too often; but they'm frank as light. 'Tis the hidden and secret thing I'd rage against."

"If you found it out."

"I should find it out. There's no power of hiding in you, even if there was the will."

"You'm a dear man," she said, and lifted her mouth and kissed him.

"All the same," she added, "every woman's got a power

of hiding—even the biggest fool amongst 'em—and—and the old gravestones of they lost people be quite as interesting to me as the crosses are to you."

"I don't say they are lost. I only say that we've no right to say anything about all them as went down to death before salvation came."

"Why couldn't Jesus Christ have hastened into the world quicker?" she asked. "'Twould have saved a deal of sad doubt about all them poor souls."

"You ought not to think such questions. I lay Woodrow said that."

"No, he didn't. 'Tis my very own thought. Suppose, Dan, that He'd been the earliest man born of a woman, and comed into the world Eve's first li'l one? How would that plan have worked?"

He stared at her.

"Who could have crucified Him?" he asked.

She sighed.

"I forgot that."

"It shows how ill-regulated your mind is, Sarah Jane. You oughtn't to let your ideas run so wild."

"'Tis no fault of yours that they do. And yet your fault it is, I do believe, Dan, for you keep me so terrible close to holy thoughts."

"The closer the better through the time that's coming. To think you could picture my boots stamping life out of a fellow-creature! 'Twasn't a kind fancy, to say no more of it. As much as to say I might be no better than a wild beast, given the temptation."

"All men are beasts when the wind blows from somewhere," she said. "Let a certain thing but happen, and they'll be as hot and stubborn and hard and fierce as the animals. Some would never forgive being robbed; some would never forgive being laughed at; some would never forgive being deceived by another person. Everybody's got one spot like that. Some will go mad for a woman;

some for a thing. Why did Agg quarrel with Lethbridge and knock him off his feet into the stream last week? Such an easy, lazy man as Agg to do it!"

"Because Lethbridge said that Agg would get a girl at Mary Tavy into trouble before he'd done with her. 'Twas an insult, and Agg was quite right to knock him down. 'Twas no fault in him."

She did not answer. Then he spoke again.

"Don't think I don't know my faults. I know 'em well enough. The gospel light shows them up very clear. But jealousy ban't a fault, and I never will allow it is. 'Tis a virtue, and every self-respecting married Christian ought to be jealous. I'm jealous of the whole world that comes near you. I'm jealous of every male eye I catch upon your face—at church or anywhere. 'Tis my nature so to be. A man that marries hands over to his wife the best he's got, and 'tis just as precious to a day labourer as to a crowned king. He does well to be jealous of it. He'd be a mean-minded fashion of creature if he wasn't."

"I don't feel like that," she replied. "You've said yourself that nought can hurt a man from the outside; so how can a wife hurt a man?"

"Good Lord! what a lot you've got to learn, Sarah Jane! To talk of a wife as being outside! Ban't she the innermost of all—a man's own self—next to his God? 'Outside'! I wouldn't like for anybody else to hear you say a man's wife is outside him—and you a wife yourself."

"I'm rested," she said. "Us'll go on. I wish I was so deep-minded as you, but I never shall be. A regular Old Testament man you are."

"'Tisn't deep-mindedness," he answered; "'tis religious-mindedness. The puzzle to me is that you, who be so good as gold and honest as light, ain't more religious-minded. John Prout's the same. I know he's all wrong, yet I can't get up and point out where he's all wrong. 'Tis what he leaves undone that's wrong."

"It takes all sorts to make a world."

"But only one sort to make heaven," he answered very earnestly.

"Lucky we are not called upon to decide what sort."

He laughed rather grimly.

"You an' Prout would let all through, if you had to judge," he said.

They reached the peat-works presently, and found Mr. Friend awaiting them. Sarah Jane praised him for putting on his Sunday coat, but she expressed greater dissatisfaction than ever at seeing the place he called home. For Gregory had been true to his word, and left Dunnagoat cot after Sarah Jane's marriage.

Now he dwelt at the scene of his futile work, and only left it once or twice a week to gather his supplies. He had taken a chamber in the ruin, boarded the floor, built up a wall in the midst, removed his grate and oven from Dunnagoat, and established himself, much to his satisfaction, in the very midst of the skeleton of the peat-works. There he dwelt perfectly happy and content. No anchorite ever chose a spot more lonely and desolate for a home; but a repellent condition usually absent from the hermit's cell belonged to Mr. Friend's abode. Here were no surroundings of a natural grot, no ivy curtain at the door, no matin song of birds to rouse the recluse. Instead scowled rotting roofs, broken walls, rusting metal and a sullen spirit of failure. The very perspective of the tram-lines, stretching straight into the midst of the ruins, by some accidental stroke upon the mind through the eye, added another mournful character to this scene.

Mr. Friend greeted them cheerfully. Tea was made, and chairs were set about his little table. His daughter protested with all her might at the miserable conditions in which he now chose to dwell.

"Look at the damp on the walls! Ban't a place for a dog to live in, let alone a man. Dunnagoat was weather-proof, anyway."

"'Twill serve very well. There's a talk of something definite come the spring. So like as not we shall set to work again afore another year's gone; and I must be on the spot. I be going to see if I can get steam in the boiler this week. But I almost doubt it. Then there's an order for Plymouth will fetch best part of a five pound note."

"Us have brought 'e a bit of news," announced Dan; "but Sarah Jane's set on telling you herself."

"Guess, father," she said.

"That Dan's got advancement. 'Twas time he had too."

Brendon shook his head.

"I wish you was right," he answered. "But you're not. It don't look as if I was ever to be raised. However, farmer may see it presently."

"He does see it," declared Sarah Jane. "He's sharp as a needle behind his quiet, casual way. He knows what you're good for. Who is it he seeks if anything's to be done? Who is it gets the difficult work, where brains be wanted to a thing? 'Twill come right, only us can't hurry it."

Brendon laughed.

"I shall get advancement the same time that you'll set your peat-works going again, and not sooner, father," he told Gregory.

"I hope so. They be both things delayed; but both be bound to happen sooner or later. You'm like Amicombe Hill—good all through, Dan. The time will come when other people will be sorry enough they didn't find it out sooner."

They discussed the various problems of Daniel Brendon and Amicombe Hill for some time. Both men were sanguine, and both wondered why other people so obstinately failed to see with their eyes. Daniel put his faith in God and declared that he felt no fear of the ultimate issue; but Mr. Friend inclined to trust man. It was idle to suppose that the results of his personal investigations on Amicombe Hill peat would be ignored for ever. He believed that some

sagacious spirit must presently arise at headquarters, justify his patient belief, and delve for the treasure that he still so zealously guarded.

Presently Gregory turned to his daughter.

"And what's the secret only you are to tell me, my dear?" he asked.

"I be going to have a little baby," said Sarah Jane.

"A big one more like! And a boy I do hope. That's capital news, and I wish you both joy of him with all my heart. If 'tis a boy, call him 'Amicombe' for luck—eh?"

"No, no! He shall be called 'Gregory' after his grandfather," declared Daniel.

The news cheered Mr. Friend, and he became very solicitous for Sarah Jane.

"Don't you let her do too much work," he said. "She mustn't tramp up here no more. I'll come down of a Sunday instead."

But his daughter laughed.

"You old dear! I shall call you a grandmother instead of a grandfather."

"I can see him running about here taking his first lessons in peat, an' messing his little self up to the eyes in it," said Mr. Friend. "An' right welcome he'll be. There's many wonders up here as I'll show him."

"Might be a girl, however," said Daniel.

"I hope not and I think not," declared the peat-master. "'Twill be a brave boy, I'm pretty sure. Us may be doing a roaring business before he appears; but be that as 'twill, I'll always make time to play a game with him. When's he coming, Sarah?"

"In September, I reckon."

"A very good time. Well, well—what would your mother think!"

"She knows all about it, be very sure," said Daniel. "And now us must get going, for the dusk be down a'ready."

"I'll come to you next Sunday," promised Gregory, as

he bade them "good-bye," after walking part of their road with them. "And there's four sacks more of my special fuel for you when you can draw them, Dan. You must keep her so warm as a toast through the spring weather, and 'if you want heat, burn Amicombe peat,' as I made up twenty years ago."

"'Tis a rhyme that will never be forgot," said his son-in-law; and Gregory, well pleased at the compliment, kissed Sarah Jane, then left them and returned to his den.

CHAPTER VI

AWAKENING OF WOODROW

Daniel Brendon had long since stopped the meetings of his master and his wife at dawn, when Sarah Jane milked the cows. He was naturally a jealous man, but in this matter emotion took an elevated form. No earthly consideration tainted it. His only concern was for Sarah Jane's soul. To let her come within the breath of infidelity, from Daniel's standpoint, seemed deliberate sin. His God was a jealous God, and, as he himself declared, he held jealousy, in certain aspects, a passion proper to healthy man. Therefore he had desired his wife not to speak with Hilary Woodrow more than she could help, for her soul's sake; and she had obeyed him, and avoided the master as far as she might without rudeness. Yet her heart felt sorrow for

Woodrow. She perceived the wide want in his life and explained it more correctly than could her husband or any other man.

On the Sunday after their visit to the peat-works, Daniel took Sarah Jane to Mary Tavy instead of to Lydford. They went to chapel with Agg; and the service pleased Brendon well. He had debated as to the propriety of praying in a place of dissent, but Agg spoke highly of his minister, and induced the other to accompany him. The incident served powerfully to affect Brendon's future, for this service, largely devoid of the familiar formulæ of his own church, impressed him with its life and reality. The people were attentive, their pastor was earnest and of a warm and loving heart. A few got up and spoke as the sitting extended; and presently, to the amazement of Sarah Jane, her husband rose and uttered some words. He rehearsed a text from Isaiah, proclaimed it to be his favourite book in the Bible, declared that it covered all things and was tremendous alike in its threats and promises. For three minutes he stood up, and his great voice woke echoes in the little, naked, white-washed meeting-house. When he knelt down again there followed a gentle hum of satisfaction.

From that day forward Brendon threw in his lot with the Luke Gospellers and made Sarah Jane do the like.

Agg congratulated him very heartily as they returned home, and Daniel explained that to have acted thus was far from his thought when he started.

"Something pulled me on to my feet and made me speak. 'Twas a force, like a strong voice, whispering in my ear. I oped Isaiah at hazard—my Bible always falls open there—and them words fell under my eye, and I had to speak."

"You'd make a very valiant hand at it with a bit of practice," declared Agg, "and the deaf would come miles for to hear you. Your voice be like a big drum."

"There was a bird sat up on the rafters," said Sarah Jane. "The poor thing had flown in, an' couldn't find

the window. It sat so still as a mouse through the sarvice till Dan spoke. Then the rafter shook, I suppose, for it flew about, and drove against the window with its little wings."

"I'm mazed to look back and think that I've actually stood afore my fellow-men and spoke to 'em from God," said Daniel. "To do such a thing never entered into my mind."

"'Twas a terrible brave deed," declared Sarah Jane. "But I ban't surprised; there's nothing you can't do, if you think 'tis right to do it."

That night Agg took Brendon again to chapel; but the wife stayed at home.

It happened that Hilary was returning from a long ride after the hour of dusk, and as he came up through his fields he met Sarah Jane alone. She had walked to meet Daniel, who would presently be returning with Agg from the evening service at Mary Tavy.

The farmer stopped, and when she prepared to go on her way, bade her wait for a few moments.

"I'm in luck," he said. "I wanted to speak to you, Sarah Jane, and here's the chance. Where are you off to at this hour?"

"Going to meet Dan. Him and Agg have gone to worship with the Luke Gospellers down-along."

"You astonish me. Such a pillar of the church as Brendon to seek some new thing!"

"We went this morning, and Daniel was terrible pleased, and liked the homely feeling of it. They'm kind folk, and Mr. Matherson, the minister, speaks and prays beautiful."

Woodrow had often mentioned serious subjects to this woman without perceiving the futility of such a course. But he did so more for the pleasure of hearing his own ideas, than from any wish to influence her. There was none to heed his opinions, none with whom to exchange thoughts and arguments touching the topics that so largely interested him. At first, therefore, he had regarded Sarah

Jane as a useful listener, and enjoyed talking to her for the sake of talking. Then her own attitude attracted him, and he spoke less and listened more. Her views arrested his mind a little. She was uneducated, yet nature had actually led her to some ideas that he had only reached through the channel of books. Once or twice, in her blunt speech and with her scanty vocabulary, she uttered a thing that wise men had only found by taking thought. Her natural mind drew Woodrow; then the lovely body of her interested him, and she began to fill his attention.

Women had almost passed out of his life after one of them jilted him; now this particular woman reminded him that they were not all alike. His eyes opened; it struck him that he was deliberately depriving himself of a great part of the joy of life by ignoring them. His thoughts began to play upon the subject, and his memory revived events of the past.

Whether it was Sarah Jane's sex, or Sarah Jane's self that had awakened him, remained to be seen. He told himself, despite his admiration for her spirit and her beauty, that it could not be the individual who had aroused dormant sense, but rather the accidental fact of having been thrown into contact with her. The world was full of women. He pondered the problem, and now, by light of moon, told Brendon's wife of a decision at which he had recently arrived.

"A great one for the Bible, my Dan," said she. "Miles of texts he've got by heart. A regular word-warrior he is."

"If he believes it, he's right to stick to it. Why, if I believed 'twas the Word of God—actually the very thoughts of the Almighty sent by Him—I'd never open any other book, Sarah Jane. I'd think that every second of my reading time spent with man's writings was a wasted moment. If I had faith—it would move mountains."

"That might be my Dan speaking. But you know pretty near so many verses as him, for all you don't believe in 'em."

"We free thinkers are much keener students of the Bible than thousands who profess to live by it."

"And yet you reckon there's no God and not another life after we die?"

"My old grandfather had a saying, 'When a man's dead, there's no more to be said.' That was his philosophy, and though my father called him a godless heathen, yet I always agreed with the old man, though I wouldn't have dared to say so. But mind this, Sarah Jane—this I will grant: if there's another world after death, then there's a God. You won't have one without the other. Nature can look after this world; but it will take a God to look after the next. Don't think I believe there's another. I'd scorn to believe anything that nature doesn't teach me. But, none the less, it may come true; and if it does, that means God."

"This life's mighty interesting," she said. "To me 'tis full to the brim; but Dan says the only drop in the cup that matters is the sure thought of the Kingdom of Heaven after."

"Trust to this life. That's a certainty, at any rate. Look after this life, and the next will look after itself."

"Funny you should say that. Dan's way's just different. He says, 'Look after the next life, and this one will look after itself'!"

"Nonsense—I'm right. And you know I'm right."

Sarah Jane felt in a mind to tell him that she was with child. As yet only her husband and her father knew it. She was about to do so, when he spoke again.

"I shall not live to be an old man," he said. "I know, as well as I know anything, that the longest half of my days are done. I thought the best of them were done too. But you've made life very interesting again and well worth living."

"You shouldn't say things like that, I'm sure, though I'm very glad you like me, Mr. Woodrow. What's amiss with you?"

"Nothing—everything."

"Your cough's better, so Mr. Prout says. I wish you'd find a wife, sir. That might be the best physic for you."

He did not answer immediately. The moon came from behind a cloud, and Sarah Jane strained her eyes into the distance.

"Dan ought to be coming," she said.

"A wife?" he asked suddenly. "Perhaps if I could find another Sarah Jane——"

"My stars! what a thought! Poor company for 'e—the likes of me!"

"I've never seen such another, all the same."

She laughed.

"Well, why for don't you look round?"

He stood still and did not reply.

"My! how bright the moon be this evening," she said. "There they are—Daniel and Walter Agg. I see 'em long ways off."

"Do you know that the moon was alive once?" he asked. "She was a mother; and now she's only a grave for all the things she bore. She's our picture, too—the skeleton at the world's feast of life. It will be just the same here, Sarah Jane—cold—dead—the earth and moon going round together—like two corpses dancing at a dying fire."

"What dreadful things you know!"

"Life's only conjuring with dust. I suppose we shall never find out how 'tis done. But there are clever chaps in the audience always jumping up and saying 'That's it! I see the trick!' Only they don't. Each new book I get hold of gives the lie to the last. There's nothing true that I can see. Like a boy chasing a butterfly: down comes his hat after a long run. But the butterfly's in the air."

"Proper place for it."

"Perhaps so. A butterfly pinned into a case is only half the truth of a butterfly. Words in a book can never be more than half the truth of ideas. But I'm sick of reading. I'm sick of everything—but you. Don't be frightened. You said just now I ought to go and look about. Well, I'm

going. I'm going to London for a while, and then down to Kent to a cousin of mine—a hop-grower there."

"The change will do you a world of good."

"That's doubtful. I shan't be very contented out of sight of Dartmoor. Perhaps if I can't see Great Links for a while, I shall value it all the more when I come back."

"And do, for pity's sake, bring a wife with 'e."

Daniel Brendon and Agg approached, and Hilary spoke to them as they arrived.

"I'm telling Mrs. Brendon that I mean to take a holiday, Dan. Going to look at London again. 'Twill make me long to be back home pretty quick, if it does nothing else."

"You might buy one of them new mowing machines against the hay-harvest, if you be up there, master," suggested Agg; but Daniel did not speak. He had returned from chapel in a spirit very amiable, and to find Sarah Jane under the moonlight with Woodrow instantly changed his mood.

They parted immediately, and Brendon spoke to Sarah Jane as they entered their home.

"What be you doing, walking about with the man after dark?"

"I was afraid you might be vexed. We met quite by chance as I came to seek you, and he stopped, and would be talking. He said he ban't going to be a long-lived man, and I told him he wants a wife; and then he said if he could get another like me he might think of it."

"Be damned to him!" said Brendon violently. "I can't stand no more of this. I won't have this talking between you. 'Tisn't right or seemly, and you ought to know it, if you're a sane woman."

"He's never said one syllable to me you couldn't hear," she answered, believing herself, but forgetting a word or two. "All the same, I'll avoid him more, Daniel, when he comes back. He may fetch along a wife with him. But don't you be angered, dear heart. I'd rather up and away from Ruddyford at cocklight to-morrow for evermore, than

you should frown. 'Tis silly to be jealous of the sun for throwing my shadow, or the wind for buffeting me."

"I am jealous. I'm a raging fire where you be concerned, and always shall be—for your soul first. I won't insult you to speak of any other thing. Any other thing's not speakable. You know I'm built so, and you don't strive to lessen it, but just the contrary. I wish you was more religious-minded and more alive to the sacredness of the married state."

"I'm myself, Dan—for good or bad."

The man was gloomy for some days after this scene, and Sarah Jane went her way with patience and unfailing good humour. She felt no anger with him on her side. She understood him a little; but jealousy was a condition of mind so profoundly foreign to her own nature, that her imagination quite failed to fathom its significance and its swift power of growth in congenial soil.

Hilary Woodrow kept his word, and presently left home for an indefinite period. He told himself that he was going away to escape temptation; in reality he went to seek it. His object was simple: to learn whether the arrival of Brendon's wife at Ruddyford had merely awakened his old interest in women generally, or whether it was she herself, and only she, who had roused him out of a long sexual apathy.

CHAPTER VII

IN COMMITTEE

HILARY WOODROW'S departure from Ruddyford made no difference to the course of events. Routine work progressed according to the prescribed custom of Dartmoor husbandry. Oats were sown during the last week of March; potatoes followed; then the seed of mangold went to ground, and lastly, in June, with the swedes, this protracted planting of crops ended.

There came a night when John Prout found himself too weary to keep an appointment at Lydford. Therefore he asked Daniel to go instead.

"'Tis the business of the water-leat," he explained. "The water's coming in autumn some time, and now Churchward and the rest are going to set about things again in earnest. The committee sits at the schoolroom this evening."

Brendon, however, doubted.

"I can't just go and say I've come to take your place," he answered. "The rest might not want me on the committee."

"Oh yes, they will," declared Prout. "You'll do a lot better than me. You'm younger and have your ideas. 'Tis about the procession and so on. A lot was done last time; but 'tis such a while agone, that I dare say they'll have to begin all over again. Anyway, I couldn't ride to Lydford to-night for a fortune. I'm dog tired."

"'Twill fit very well," said Sarah Jane, who was clearing away the tea-things in Ruddyford kitchen. "I walk into Lydford myself this evening, to take the butter to Mrs. Weekes. Say you'll go, Daniel."

"I'm willing enough. The only point is if I can serve on a committee in place of another man."

"Certainly you can," said Mr. Prout. "They'll be very pleased to see you, I'm sure. Jarratt Weekes is a member, and he'll take you along with him."

"I'll go, then," assented Daniel, "and Weekes will post me up in the business, no doubt."

It happened that relations of a harmonious character existed at present between the family of Philip Weekes and Ruddyford. Hephzibah took large quantities of Sarah Jane's butter into Plymouth every Saturday; and sometimes Philip himself, or the girl Susan, came for this produce. Occasionally it was brought to Lydford by a messenger from the farm. The Brendons were now on terms of friendship with Jarratt's parents and of superficial friendship with the castle-keeper himself.

To-night Sarah Jane and Daniel heard the familiar voice raised as they entered the front gate, and, despite a loud summons, they stood some while under the dusk, with the scent of the garden primroses in their nostrils, before any attention was paid to them.

Then Susan appeared, and as she opened the door the full and withering blast of Hephzibah's rhetoric burst upon the air.

"Didn't hear 'e first time," said the girl. "Aunt's in one of her tantrums. A very awkward thing's happed just now. Awkward for Uncle Philip, I mean. He was in the street talking to Mr. Churchward; and unbeknownst to him, on our side the wall, not two yards off, Aunt Hepsy chanced for to be."

"Never mind all that," interrupted Sarah Jane. "Here's the butter, and my husband be come to see Jarratt. We don't want to hear none of your rows, Susie."

"You'll have to hear—you know what Aunt Hepsy be."

They went into the kitchen, and Mrs. Weekes, without saluting them, instantly turned the torrent of her speech in their direction.

Philip sat by the fire with his hands in his pockets and his wistful grey eyes roaming, rather like a wild animal

caught in a trap; his son was eating at the table; Mrs. Weekes stood in the middle of the kitchen; her legs were planted somewhat apart, and her arms waved like semaphores to accentuate her speech.

"Your eyes be enough," she said. "You cast 'em to the ceiling, an' search the floor an' the fire with 'em; but you can't hide the guilt in 'em—you evil-speaking traitor! He'd have me dead—what d'you think of that, Sarah Jane? As a wife you can understand, perhaps. Every word I caught when I was in the garden—doing his work, of course, and picking the lettuces that he'd ought to have picked and washed and packed two hours afore. An' him t'other side of the wall telling to that wind-bag that teaches the children—though what he does teach 'em except to use long, silly words, I can't say. 'The sooner she's dead the better!' That was the thing my husband spoke—in a murdering voice he spoke it. And my knees curdled away under me—the Lord's my judge! I could almost hear him sharpening a knife to do it! 'The sooner she's dead the better.' That was what he said. Murder, I call it—black murder; and he'll hang in the next world for it, if he don't in this. Wished me dead! Knave—foul-minded rascal!—beastly coward to kill the wife of his bosom with a word! And now——"

The familiar gasp for which her husband waited came, and he spoke before she could resume.

"I'll only say this. I was speaking of Adam Churchward's old collie bitch—may I be stuck fast on to this settle for evermore if I wasn't; and when I said 'sooner she's dead the better,' 'twas in answer to schoolmaster's question. If I was struck dumb this instant moment, that's the truth."

"Truth—you grey and godless lump of horror! Truth—who be you to talk of truth? After this the very word 'truth' did ought to rust your tongue black and choke you! Not a word of that will I believe. 'Twas me you meant; an' when I heard it, I tell you the sky went round like a wheel. I catched hold of a clothes-post to stop myself from

falling in a heap. And now if cherubims in a flaming, fiery chariot come down for me from heaven, I wouldn't go. Nothing would take me—I'd defy death for my indignation! I'll see you out yet, you wife-murderer, you vagabond, you cut-throat dog of a man—ess fay, I'll see you out if I've got to wait twenty thousand years to do it!"

"Here," said Jarratt Weekes to Daniel Brendon, "me and you will get from this. When she lets go, you might as well try to put in a word with a hurricane as with her."

"All the same, it was Churchward's old worn-out dog, as he'll testify to," said Philip. "The creature's suffering, and she'll be killed to-morrow morn; an' that's evidence for anybody who's got a level mind and no grudge against me. Be it sense or reason that I'd say a thing like that to a neighbour—even if I thought it?"

"How you can sit there with your owl's eyes a-glaring——" began Mrs. Weekes—then Daniel followed Jarratt.

"I'll come back along for you presently," he said to Sarah Jane. "You stop here till we're home from the committee."

A moment later he explained his purpose, and Weekes raised no objection.

"'Tis a silly business altogether," he said. "I so good as swore I'd not join 'em again myself; but if the thing's to be, 'tis well there should be a little sense among these foolish old men. You can take Prout's place and welcome. Churchward will try to talk Latin about it when he hears, and pull a long face, and say 'tis irregular or some rot. But if I tell him I wish it, he'll cave in. Last meeting was at his home; but we turned the room into a public-house bar before we'd done with it, and so his daughter won't let us assemble there again. Quite right too."

"A very fine woman she is—so Sarah Jane tells me."

"She is—and plenty of sense. In fact——"

Jarratt broke off and changed the subject; but Daniel, without tact, returned to it.

"I hope we'll all soon be wishing you joy in that matter."

Weekes made no answer at all. The thought was bitter to him that this common man, who had beaten him and won Sarah Jane, could thus easily approach him as an equal and congratulate him on his minor achievement. He hated anything to remind him of the past, and disliked to think that the fact of his rumoured engagement to Mary Churchward had reached the Brendons' ears. This girl was a promising wife enough; but she fell far short of Sarah Jane in beauty and strength and melody of voice.

"There's the schoolroom—the hour was seven-thirty, so we'm a thought late," said Jarratt Weekes.

They entered to find the rest of the committee assembled. Mr. Churchward, Mr. Spry, Mr. Huggins, Mr. Norseman, Mr. Pearn and Mr. Taverner—all were there.

Weekes explained that Daniel Brendon had come to represent John Prout, and suggested that the rest should fall in with this alteration. Some questions arose whether it could be permitted, and the schoolmaster instantly fulfilled Jarratt's prophecy by doubting if Daniel might stand for Prout—*in propria persona*.

Nathaniel Spry was referred to, but would express no definite opinion; then Weekes spoke again, inviting the committee to use its common sense, if it had any, and asked what earthly difference it could make to the upshot whether one farming man or another joined their deliberations.

"Me an' Mr. Prout think alike in some ways—not in all," explained Brendon. "As to such a matter as a revel, when the water's brought into Lydford, we might be of one mind. But I warn you, please, that in matters of religion we're different."

"That's all right, then," declared Noah Pearn, the publican, "for this hasn't nothing to do with religion—any more than my free lunch have."

"All the same I'll be party to nothing that can hurt religion, and well the committee knows it," declared Mr. Norseman.

"Don't you shout till you're hurt," said Weekes. "We're not heathen, I believe. I propose that Mr. Brendon takes Prout's place on the committee, and I ask you to second, schoolmaster."

None raised any further objection. Daniel took his place and Mr. Churchward turned to Nathaniel Spry.

"Read the minutes of the last meeting," he said.

The postmaster rose rather nervously and shuffled his papers.

"Keep it short as you can, Spry. We wasted a lot of time over that meeting—don't want to be here all night," remarked Jacob Taverner.

"I can't be 'urried, Jacob," answered the other. "I'm secretary, and I've done the work in a very secretarial way, and it's got to be read—all of it—hasn't it, Mr. Churchward?"

"Certainly it has," answered the schoolmaster. "In these cases the minutes of previous assemblies have to be kept carefully, including all memoranda and data. There is a right way and a wrong way, and——"

"Get on!" interrupted Weekes. "If Spry have to read out all that mess and row we had at the first meeting—sooner he's about it the better."

Nathaniel Spry rose and wiped his glasses.

"Go under the lamp, postmaster," said Brendon. "You'll see better."

"Thank you," answered the secretary. "Much obliged to you. I will do so."

"One thing," suddenly remarked Noah Pearn. "I want to ax whether among the characters in the show we might have Judge Jeffreys. I seed his name in an old book awhile ago, and 'tis clear he held his court to Lydford castle. Shall he walk with the procession?"

"We can go into that later. We *must* read the minutes first. Otherwise everything is *ultra vires* and illegal," declared Mr. Churchward.

"Well, Spry can set it at rest in a minute by saying who

Judge Jeffreys was—that is if he knows," suggested Mr. Taverner.

"We all know that," declared Mr. Norseman. "He was a regular historical Lydford character."

"Would he do to walk, Spry, or wouldn't he? Answer in a word. If he's no good—we need say no more."

"Order!" cried Mr. Churchward. "I call everybody to order who interferes with Spry. We must have the minutes!"

"You ought to know about Judge Jeffreys yourself," said Weekes shortly. "You're a schoolmaster, and should have the whole history of the man at your finger-ends."

"And so I have," declared Mr. Churchward. "Of course I have. Who doubts it?"

"Then let's hear it. Ban't for the chairman to deny information to the committee," said Mr. Pearn.

Adam shrugged his shoulders.

"I bow to your opinions, though it's very unbusinesslike and improper."

Then he turned to Spry and spoke with resignation.

"Tell them about Judge Jeffreys, Nathaniel—since they insist upon knowing. If you make any mistake, I'll correct you."

Mr. Spry dropped his report hopelessly, took off his glasses and scratched his head over the right ear.

"He wasn't a very nice man, if my memory serves me, gentlemen. A thought 'asty and a thought 'arsh. There's poetry written about him. He did his work in the time of Charles I., or it might be Charles II."

"Or the Commonwealth," interrupted Mr. Churchward.

"Very true—very true, 'or the Commonwealth,' as you say, schoolmaster. He was rather what is called a hanging judge. Still, his red robes and flowing wig would be a great addition to the scene."

"Let the man walk!" cried Mr. Huggins. "A solemn judge would be so good as a sermon to all the young youths for miles around, and show 'em what wickedness might bring 'em to at any moment."

"You don't mean that, Mr. Huggins," explained Brendon, who knew the veteran. "You mean——"

"We all know what he means," declared Mr. Taverner. "Well, you propose Jeffreys and I'll second it, Noah."

"In due course—in due course. The judge shall pass committee in his proper turn," said Mr. Churchward. "Now, Spry, read as quickly as you can, but nothing's to be missed."

"How long is the report?" asked Henry Norseman.

"Twenty-four pages of foolscap and a half," answered the secretary. "I've written it all out twice, and it filled my spare time for three weeks doing it."

"Let's take the thing as read!" suggested Mr. Taverner.

But Nathaniel objected indignantly.

"Not at all!" he said. "I won't have that. I appeal to the chair—three weeks' work——"

"Don't want to have any words with you, postmaster; but all the same, without feeling, as a member of this committee, I propose we take the minutes as read," answered Taverner firmly.

"Who'll second that?" asked Weekes.

"I will," said Noah Pearn.

Mr. Churchward sighed, shook his head tragically, and put his hand over his brow.

"I do wish, Jacob Taverner, you would bend to the law of committees and listen to the chair," he begged. "Don't you understand me? I'm pretty good at making myself clear, I believe—it's my business to do so to the youthful mind—and I tell you it *can't* be done. Legally everything we enact before the minutes are read is nothing at all—a mere *lapsus linguæ*, in fact."

"Besides," said Daniel, "I beg to say I ought to hear the minutes—else how can I know what was settled at the first meeting?"

"You're soon answered," replied Jarratt Weekes. "Nothing was settled at the first meeting."

"I beg your pardon, Jarratt," said Adam Churchward.

"That is neither kind nor true. A great deal was settled—else how would it take Nathaniel Spry twenty-four and a half pages of foolscap to put it all down? And no man writes a better or neater hand. Therefore I ask you to call back that statement."

"There was a lot said—I admit. But surely you must allow there was mighty little done," retorted Weekes.

"The question is whether the minutes are to be taken as read. I've proposed that and Pearn's seconded it," repeated Mr. Taverner.

"And I rule it out of order, Taverner, so there's an end of that," answered Adam.

"The question is if you can rule it out of order," replied Jacob Taverner.

"Certainly he can. Bless the man, he's done it!" said Brendon.

"He *says* he's done it; but if it's not legal, he can't do it. Everybody's got a right to speak on a committee, and I never heard in all my born days that a chairman could rule a thing out of order, if 'twas properly proposed and seconded," answered the other.

Much irrelevant but heated argument followed, and none could satisfy Jacob that the chair was in the right.

Suddenly the landlord of the Castle Inn turned to Valentine Huggins.

"Let's abide by you, Val," he cried. "You'm the oldest among us. I warrant Taverner will abide by you. What do you say?"

"I say 'beer,'" piped the ancient man. "I be so dry as a dead bone along o' listening; what you talking members must be, I can't picture."

"I second," declared Weekes; "and 'tis idle for you to pretend that can't be passed, Churchward, because we're unanimous—except Norseman, who'll have his bottle of lemonade as per usual, no doubt."

Mr. Pearn had already put on his hat.

"I'll nip round myself an' tell 'em to send it in," he declared. Then he hurried off.

"I'm in your hands, of course," began the schoolmaster. "I merely remark that I don't pay again. If you had listened to the minutes, you'd have been reminded that the chairman stood liquor and tobacco last time. We must give and take—even in committee."

"I'll pay half," said Mr. Taverner.

"And I'll pay the rest," declared Nathaniel Spry, —"provided the committee will keep quiet and let me read the minutes while it's drinking."

"That's fair enough, certainly," said Brendon. "By the looks of it, this meeting won't have no time to do more than hear what fell out at the last. 'Tis near nine o'clock now, and us no forwarder."

When Mr. Pearn returned with a pot-boy and three quarts of ale, the secretary had started upon his report. Nobody paid much attention to him save Daniel Brendon; but as soon as the liquor was poured out—by which time Mr. Spry had come to St. George and the Dragon—an interruption took place.

"I ask for that passage to be given again," said Mr. Norseman. "I heard my name, but I didn't catch what went with it."

Nathaniel read as follows:—

"Mr. Valentine Huggins then proposed that the Dragon should go along with St. George, and it was suggested that Mr. William Churchward should enact the Dragon. Mr. Norseman then said that he would be party to no play-acting, because play-acting in his opinion was wickedness; and he added that if the committee persisted in this opinion, he would think it his duty to put the matter before the vicar. Mr. William Churchward was privately approached by the chairman subsequent to the meeting and refused to play Dragon——"

"If that's still your opinion, Norseman, you'd better go

off the committee," said Mr. Taverner; "because to dress up to be somebody else is play-acting in a way, even though nought's said. You be in a minority of one, so you may just as well retire."

"I may be, or I may not be," answered Mr. Norseman. "I'm here to do my duty to the best of my power, and, in a word, I shan't retire."

"I don't hold with play-acting either," declared Daniel suddenly.

"Ban't sure that I do, on second thoughts," added Mr. Huggins. "Anyway, I want to say that if any other member would like to be Moses——"

"That's all settled and passed, and you can't withdraw, Valentine," replied Mr. Churchward. "Go on, Nat."

"What is play-acting and what isn't?" asked Mr. Pearn. "We'd better settle that once for all. I say 'tisn't play-acting if no speeches are made."

"If it has been carried that Mr. Huggins is to be dressed up as Moses, I'm afraid I must vote against it," said Daniel. "I'm very sorry to do anything contrary to the general wish, but I couldn't support that. In my view 'tis playing the fool with a holy character."

"Don't be so narrow-minded," said Mr. Taverner.

"You must be narrow-minded if you want to keep in the narrow way," declared Norseman. "The man's right, though I haven't seen him in church for three months."

"If we're going back on what we passed last time—'tis idle for you to read any more, postmaster," said Mr. Churchward. "I may remind the committee that Mr. Norseman himself had no objection to Moses before."

"More shame to me," answered the churchwarden frankly. "I was weak, as them in a minority too often find themselves; but now, with this man beside me, I'm strong, and I stand out against Moses tooth and nail."

"Let's drop Moses, souls!" said Mr. Huggins. "We can walk very well without him, and we don't want to offend

church or chapel, I'm sure. 'Twould be a bad come-along-of-it if we had vicar and the quality against us. If I can give him up, I'm sure all you men ought to."

Jarratt Weekes had been turning over the pages of Mr. Spry's report while the rest talked. Now he suddenly rose to his feet and shouted loudly:

"Look here, Spry—what's this you've got here? Like your insolence—making me look a fool in the eyes of the committee! This stuff shan't be read—not officially. You've put words here that I spoke in heat. Not that they wasn't perfectly reasonable ones—all the same, they shouldn't be recorded. I'm not going to be written down, in cold blood, as using swear words. 'Tisn't fair to anybody's character. Here it is, neighbours, and I ask you if 'tis right—page twenty-one—"

He read as follows:—

"'The chairman then quoted the Latin language, which annoyed Mr. Jarratt Weekes, who thereupon asked him, why the hell he couldn't talk English."

"You oughtn't to have put that down, Nathaniel," said Mr. Churchward reproachfully. "It would far better have become you to leave that out. If I could forgive it—which I did do—surely——"

"There it is for anybody to see," continued Weekes; "and I propose we burn his silly minutes, for they'm nothing but a tissue of twaddle and impertinence and——"

"I rise to order!" cried Mr. Spry. "I'm not going to be insulted to my face and stand it. I claim the protection of the chair and the committee in general. What right had I to doctor the report? If people use foul language on a committee and lose their tempers and misbehave themselves at a public function, let 'em take the consequences!"

"You shut your mouth!" shouted Weekes, "or I'll make you. A pink-eyed rabbit of a man like you to stab me in the back with your pen and ink! I——"

"Order—order!" cried Pearn and Taverner simultane-

ously. Everybody began to talk at once, and Brendon turned to the chairman.

"Why the mischief don't you keep order?" he asked.

"Easy to say—easy to say," answered Adam wildly. "But what mortal man's going to do it?"

"'Twas you broke up the last meeting, Weekes, an' I don't think none the better of you for it," grumbled Mr. Huggins. "All the same us shan't get through no business now—an' the beer be all drunk and the time's past ten——"

"I propose we adjourn," said Mr. Norseman.

"And so do I," added Brendon. "Never knowed myself that a lot of growed-up men could make such a row and be so foolish."

"The meeting is suspended *sine die*, gentlemen," declared Adam Churchward, "and I may add that I'll not be chairman again. No—I will not. The strain is far too severe for a sensitive man."

"Just like you," answered Weekes. "The moment you get into a mess, you curl up, same as a frightened woodlouse. You're not the proper man for a chairman."

"And you're not the proper man for a committee," answered Adam, very pink and hot. "'Tis all your fault, and I say it out, notwithstanding the—the relations in which we stand. You've not the self-control for a committee. And you do swear a great deal too much—both in public and private life."

They wrangled on while Norseman and Brendon departed, and Spry only stayed to see his report scattered on the floor under everybody's feet. Then, with an expression of opinion unusually strong for him, he took his hat and went home. Mr. Pearn looked after the crockery, Mr. Taverner assisted Valentine Huggins into his coat and saw him on his way.

"Out of evil cometh good, Jacob," said the ancient. "Be it as 'twill, I've got Moses off my back. But this here have furnished a dreadful lesson to me not to push myself forward into the public eye. Never again will I seek to be uplifted in company. 'Twas only the sudden

valour of beer made me offer myself, and I've never had a easy moment since."

Elsewhere Mr. Churchward and Jarratt quickly settled their difference. Indeed, as soon as Spry had departed, the chairman adopted an attitude very disloyal to the postmaster, and even called him an officious little whippersnapper. This appeased the injured Weekes, and when his future father-in-law went further and invited him home to see Mary and drink some whisky, Jarratt relented.

"Us'll drop this business once for all," he said. "It don't become your position to sit over a lot of silly fools that don't know their own mind. You've got something better to do with your time, I'm sure. When I'm married to Mary, you shall help me with figures and suchlike. Anyway, don't you call them ignorant men together again. I won't have it. Let the water come and be damned to it. 'Tis nothing to make a fuss about when all's said."

"You may be right," admitted Mr. Churchward. "In Christian charity the committee meant well, but they have not been educated. There's no logic—nothing to work upon. I'm disappointed, for I had spent a good deal of thought upon the subject. However, if it's got to fall through—there's an end of it."

And Brendon, as he tramped home with Sarah Jane, made her laugh long and loud while he told of the meeting. He was not much amused himself—only somewhat indignant at the waste of hours represented by that evening's work.

CHAPTER VIII

ADVENT

GREGORY DANIEL BRENDON was born on the first day of October, and work nearly stood still at Ruddyford until the doctor had driven off and the great event belonged to past time. Nothing could have been more splendidly successful than his arrival, or himself. There was only one opinion concerning him, and when in due course the child came to be baptized, he enjoyed a wide and generous measure of admiration.

Hephzibah, who was nothing if not superlative, attended the christening, and, after that ceremony, proclaimed her opinion of the infant. Sarah Jane, whose habit of mind led her to admire Mrs. Weekes, had asked Philip's wife to be godmother, and such a very unusual compliment awakened a great fire of enthusiasm in the sharp-tongued woman's heart.

After a Sunday ceremony, according to the rite of the Luke Gospellers, all walked on foot back to Ruddyford, and Mrs. Weekes, with Sarah Jane upon one side of her and Susan, carrying the baby, on the other, improved the hour.

"Only yesterday, to market, Mrs. Swain said 'My dear Hephzibah'—so she always calls me—'why, you'm not yourself—you'm all a-dreaming! I ax for a brace of fowls,' she says, 'and, merciful goodness,' she says, 'you hand me a pat of butter!' 'Twas true. My mind ran so upon this here child, as we've marked wi' the Sign to-day. I tell you, Sarah Jane, that, cautious as I am in my use of words, I can't speak too well of him. He's a regular right down masterpiece of a child. Look at his little round barrel, if you don't believe me. An' a hand as will grasp hold that tight! An' a clever child, I warn 'e. Did 'e mark the eyes of un when he seed parson's gold watch-chain? He knowed!

'Twas his first sight of gold—yet up his fingers went to it—an' he pulled a very sour face when he had to let go. There's wisdom there—mark me. And hair like a good angel's. True 'tis only the first crop an' he'll moult it; but you can always take a line through the first what the lasting hair will be. Curly, I warrant, an' something darker than yours, but brighter than his father's."

"He've got his father's eyes to a miracle," said Sarah Jane.

"He'm listening to every word you be saying!" declared Susan.

"A precious, darling, li'l, plump, sweet, tibby lamb!" cried Mrs. Weekes in an ecstasy. "Hold off his blanket, Susie. Yes, if he ban't taking it all in. A wonder and a delight, you mark me, mother. You've done very clever indeed, and never have I seen such a perfect perfection of a baby, since my own son Jarratt was born. Just such another he was—a thought more stuggy in the limbs, perhaps, as was natural with such round parents; but noways different else. Would fasten on a bit of bright metal like a dog on a bone."

"My little one's got lovelier eyes, if I may say so—lovelier eyes than Jarratt's," said Sarah Jane.

"'Tis a matter of opinion. Some likes blue, some brown, some grey. Eyes be same as hosses: you can't have good ones a bad colour. Taking it all round, grey eyes see more than brown ones, and little eyes more than big ones. But long sight or short, us can all see our way to glory. This here infant's marked for goodness. Mind you let him use my spoon so soon as ever he can. 'Tis real silver, Sarah Jane, as the lion on the handle will tell 'e, if you understand such things."

"I knowed that well enough the moment I saw it, and so did Tabitha. 'Tis a very beautiful spoon indeed. He's had it in his mouth a'ready, for that matter."

"Trust him!—a wonder as he is! There ban't nothing he won't know the use for very soon. That child will be

talking sense in twelve months! I know it! I'm never wrong in such matters. A lusty tyrant for 'e; an' a great drinker, I warrant!"

"A grand thirsty boy for sartain," admitted the mother. "An' my bosom's always brimming for his dear, li'l, red lips, thank God!"

Mrs. Weekes nodded appreciatively.

"You've got to think of his dairy for the present. Who be looking after Ruddyford's?"

"Why, I be," said Sarah Jane. "I was only away from work five weeks."

"When do Mr. Woodrow come back?"

"Afore Christmas, 'tis said; and that reminds me: Mr. Prout wants a tell with your son. There's something in the wind, though what it is I can't say."

"I'll carry the message. I see Prout chattering to Weekes behind us now; but 'twill be better he gives me any message that's got money to it. When Philip Weekes says he'll bear a thing in mind, 'tis a still-birth every time, for nothing's ever delivered alive from his addled brain. That poor man! But 'tis Sunday and a day of grace. However, I'll speak to Prout. Susan—what—here, give me over the child this instant moment. You hold un as if he was a doll, instead of an immortal Christian spirit, to be an angel come his turn. An' that's more'n ever you can hope to be, you tousled, good-for-nought!"

Joe Tapson and Walter Agg joined the women.

"These be the two men gossips," said Sarah Jane. "I wanted for Mr. Prout to be one, but Daniel mistrusted his opinions. Dan's very particular indeed about religion, you must know."

"Quite right too," said Mrs. Weekes. "And I hope as you men will keep that in mind and never say a crooked word or do a crooked thing afore this infant hero. He's a better built boy than either of you ever was, without a doubt, and you can see—by the make of his head-bones—that he'll be a master one day and raised up above common

men—just like my own son be. But never you dare to lead him astray, or I'll know the reason why. I'm his godmother, and I don't take on a job of this sort without being wide awake. An' if there's any faults show in him presently, I'll have a crow to pluck with you men very quick."

"What about his father, ma'am?" asked Agg.

"I'll say the same to him as I say to you," she replied. "I'll stand no nonsense from his father. The child's worth ten of his father a'ready. Lord! the noble weight of him! Here, take hold of him, Sarah Jane, for the love of heaven. He's pulling my arms out of the arm-holes!"

At the rear of the party walked together the father and grandfather of the baby.

Daniel had talked about his child until he felt somewhat weary of the subject. But nothing could tire Gregory Friend. Already he planned the infant's first visit to the peat-works, and every time that his son-in-law changed the subject, he returned to it.

Daniel laughed.

"Well, you'll have two things to talk about now," he said. "Afore 'twas only peat—now 'twill be peat an' the baby."

"Yes," answered Gregory, "you'm quite right there, Daniel. I'll larn him all I know, and I dare say, if he's spared, he'll find out more than I know. But my secrets that child shall have in course of time—if he proves worthy of 'em."

John Prout and Philip Weekes walked together and discussed another subject.

"He's coming home presently," said the head man of Ruddyford, "but the doctors reckon he'll be wise to stop off the high ground and winter in the valleys. His idea be to put up at Lydford for the winter, and he's divided between taking a couple of rooms at the Castle Inn, with Noah Pearn, or renting a house if he can get one. He'd rather have the house for peace and quietness. But 'tisn't often a house worth calling one be in the market to Lydford. Now

I'm thinking of your son's place—what he bought back-along from widow Routleigh before she died."

"Might suit Jar very well, I should think," said the other. "'Tis true he's going to be married to the school-master's daughter; but they'm not in any hurry. In fact, there's more business than pleasure to the match, I fancy, though I wouldn't dare to say so. Anyway, the cottage is empty now. 'Twould want doing up. 'Tis the very house for a tender man—sheltered from north and east and west, wi' a face that catches every glimmer of sun that shines."

"I'll name it to master in writing. I'm sadly troubled about it all. I suppose you don't know what your son would ax?"

"Can't tell you that. The more Mr. Woodrow wants it, the higher Jarratt will rise. That's business, of course. I'm not saying nothing in praise of such a way of doing things, but merely telling you what will happen."

"Of course master may prefer Bridgetstowe or Mary Tavy. Your son mustn't think there's no competition."

"I'll name it to him," said Mr. Weekes. "By rights I ought to get a little bit of a commission if it goes through; but nobody won't think of that."

They talked further, and Prout deplored the fact that Hilary Woodrow's condition had called for a visit to the doctor. It was thought he had been exceedingly well and happy among his friends and relatives in Kent. Then came the frosty news of indifferent health. Philip shared John's regret, and they still discussed the matter when Ruddyford was reached.

Tabitha had prepared a handsome tea which all attended, and Gregory Daniel sat on his grandfather's knee and watched the eating of the christening cake. A handsome silver mug quite threw Hephzibah's spoon into the shade. The gift commanded very general admiration, and Mrs. Weekes, when appealed to, declared that it could not have cost a penny less than five pounds. It came from Hilary Woodrow.

"I'm hoping he'll lift Dan up a bit after he comes back," Sarah Jane said privately to Mrs. Weekes, as the tea progressed. "My man's worked like a pair of hosses since master went away; and everybody knows it."

"Why for do he stop if he'm not satisfied with his wages?" asked Hephzibah. "Such a mighty man he is. Why, if there was an inch or two more of him, he might a'most have got his living in a doom-show, an' never done a stroke more work. I seed a giant at Plymouth fair two or three years back—a poor reed of a man, up seven foot high, wi' death written in the great, sorrowful white face of him. But Dan's so strong as he be large."

"He wouldn't fling up Ruddyford for anything. He gets very good money, you know, though not so good as he could wish. Then there's father up to the peat-works. I promised, and Dan promised, not to go very far off from him."

Mrs. Weekes shook her head at Gregory Friend, though he did not appreciate the fact, for he was talking to Philip.

"A wilful and a silly soul, though your father," she said. "'Tis wasting the years of his life to stop up there—no better than a pelican in the wilderness. He ought to be made to drop it."

"I wish you could make him," said Sarah Jane. "Already he's planning to teach the baby all about peat."

"'Peat'!" cried Hephzibah scornfully. "I hope no godchild of mine will sink to peat. Let me make a market-man of him, and take him afore the nation, and teach him the value of money, and the knack to get it, and the way to stick to it!"

"'Tis very good of you, I'm sure," declared the mother. "I hope he'll be much drawed to you, come he grows."

"He's drawed to me already," asserted Mrs. Weekes. "We understand each other mighty well."

Going home with her husband, Hephzibah heard the news concerning Hilary Woodrow and his proposed winter lodg-

ment. She was much excited, and even Mr. Weekes won a word of praise. But he deserved it, and, in justice, his wife dispensed the same.

When first he told her, she stood still and rated him.

"You post—you stock of a man!—couldn't you see that the first thing was Woodrow's address? Now others will get to hear tell of this, and then Thorpe will be offering his dog-kennel of a house at Little Lydford, or them Barkells at Bridgetstowe will try to get him for that tumble-down hovel by the church. Why didn't Prout tell me instead of you? If you were a man instead of a mommet,[1] you'd turn back this minute and not rest till you'd got farmer's address for Jarratt. 'Tis taking bread out of your son's mouth if you don't—mark me."

"I'll run back an' get it, if you like," said Susan, who walked beside her aunt.

"As a matter of fact, the address is took down in my pocket-book," explained Mr. Weekes with calm triumph. "An' more than that: I've got John Prout's faithful promise not to tell nobody else the address till we've had two days' start. That may be the work of a post or a mommet, or it may not. For my part, I'm pleased with myself."

"Then why ever didn't you say so?" asked Mrs. Weekes. "'Twas a very proper, smart thing to do, Philip—and a very hopeful thing in you. I always say, and always shall say, that so far as Almighty God's concerned, He've done His part in you. You've got a handsome share of intellects—in fact, more than your share, if you wouldn't be so rash and reckless."

"So I say myself," answered the huckster; "and another thing: I ought to have a bit of commission from Jarratt, if this goes through. A lot of these little bits of business I do for him, off and on, but I never get a half-crown from the man."

"If it goes through, us ought to be thought upon, certainly," admitted his wife; "but what with his marriage

[1] *Mommet*, Scarecrow.

next year, and that bad debt to Sourton, and one thing and another, Jar won't be flinging his money about over-free just now."

CHAPTER IX

A HUNGRY MAN

HILARY WOODROW returned home at Christmas. In the meantime he had heard from Jarratt Weekes and agreed to take his cottage at Lydford for an indefinite period.

The farmer conversed at length with John Prout, but told him little respecting his adventures in London, or in Kent. His health appeared to be entirely satisfactory, but Hilary explained that he had received certain medical warnings. His lungs were not strong. His physician did not object to a winter spent in Devonshire, but advised that the master of Ruddyford should seek a milder home than the Moor until spring returned.

"In soft weather I shall ride up every day," explained Woodrow; "but when the frost is heavy, or we're getting nothing but rain, I shall keep down below."

It was arranged that he should go into Jarratt's house immediately after Christmas, and, to her immense satisfaction, Susan secured the post of Hilary's servant. Her aunt managed this, and duly impressed upon the maiden that here was the opportunity of a lifetime. Let her but cook and order the simple household in a manner to suit Mr.

Woodrow, and her fortune must unquestionably be made, so Mrs. Weekes assured her; but, on the other hand, if she failed to satisfy an unexacting bachelor, then her case was hopeless, and she must never expect to achieve the least success in service or in life. To Susan's face Hephzibah expressed the most fearful doubts; behind her back she assured the neighbours that her niece was well suited to the post.

"Have I been a-training of her four years for nought?" she asked. "A flighty wench, I grant you, and full of faults as any other young thing, but she can stand to work and take care of herself very well; and she've always got me to fall back upon for advice and teaching, seeing I'm but fifty yards away."

Of Hilary's inner life, while absent from his home, John Prout naturally heard nothing, and it was a woman, not a man, who shared the farmer's confidence. He had striven to seek escape of mind from Sarah Jane in the society of other women; and he had failed. He spent very little time in London, and found himself glad to quit it again. His old enjoyment thereof was dead. The place offended him, choked him, bored him. He had no desire towards any of its pleasures while there. Instead, he grew anxious about his health.

In Kent he found himself happier, yet the conditions of agriculture, rather than any personal relations with kindred, occupied his days. The hops gave him much interest. His cousins and their friends found him cold and indifferent. Sarah Jane's image haunted his loneliness, and her picture in his mind's eye was a lovelier and more tangible thing to him than the living shapes of the amiable young women he met. He had devoted a day to purchasing the silver cup for Sarah Jane's baby; and on return home he had pleased Daniel greatly by his attitude towards the infant.

"I would have offered to be a godparent," he explained to Brendon; "but you must take the will for the deed.

With my views I could not have done so, and you would not have desired it. Nevertheless, I wish your child every good. 'Twill be a pleasant thing presently to have a little one about the place; and it should make us all younger again."

Brendon was gratified, and since his master henceforth adopted extreme care in his approach to Sarah Jane, relations proceeded in a manner very satisfactory to all.

But fierce fires burnt in both men out of sight. One's natural jealousy and suspicion kept him keenly alive to every shadow on the threshold of his home's honour; the other knew now with absolute knowledge that Brendon's wife was the first and greatest thought in his mind. Passionately he desired her. He believed that his own life was not destined to be lengthy, and his interests largely narrowed to this woman. Of late ethics wearied him. He was impressed with the futility of the eternal theme. For a season he sickened of philosophy and self-restraint. He found Sarah Jane lovelier, sweeter, more distracting every way than when he left her. At Ruddyford no opportunity offered to see her alone. Then, as he knew they must when taking the Lydford cottage, chances began to occur.

She often came with the butter for Mrs. Weekes, and Friday was a fever day for Woodrow, until he saw her pass his dwelling on the way to the village.

Once they spoke at some length together, for he was riding back to the farm for an hour or two. The time was dry and cold. A powder of snow scattered the ground, but the air braced, though the grey north spoke of heavier snow to come.

"You never asked me about all my adventures when I was away, Sarah Jane," he said. "I had such a number of things to tell you, but unkind fate seems to make it impossible for me to talk to the one person in the world I love to talk to."

"What silliness! I'm sure John Prout's a better listener than me."

"Prout's an old woman—you're a young one. That's the difference. He bothers over my health as if he was my mother. You don't let that trouble you, Sarah Jane?"

"Indeed but I do. 'Twas only a bit agone, at your gate, I was asking Susan if you took your milk regular, and ate your meat as you should. And when she said what a poor feeder you was, I blamed her cooking, and told her I'd bring a recipe or two from Tabitha, who knows the things you like. And I did."

"If you're hungry one way, you've no appetite another. Let me tell you about myself. We always want to talk of ourselves when we're miserable, and only care to hear about other people when we're happy. I went to seek peace and I found none. Nobody comforted me—nobody knew how to. Nobody knew Sarah Jane, and that was the only subject that could interest me."

"Doan't 'e begin that foolishness again. I had hoped so much as you might have found a proper maiden to love you and marry you."

"Who can love me? No, I don't ask that now. But—oh, Sarah Jane, I do ask you to see me sometimes—only very seldom—so that I may hear your voice and look into your eyes."

"Dan——"

"Is it my fault? Can you help loving your husband or your child? Can I help loving you? No—don't look wild and wretched, as if you thought you were going to be caught in a thunderstorm. I do love you, and only you; and my love for you is the only thing that kept me from going mad in London. You can buy sham love there, and sham diamonds, and sham everything. Shams are on sale to suit all purses. Once, when first I went there, I enjoyed them—not now. There's only one real love and one real woman in the world now. But don't be frightened, Sarah Jane. The knights of old loved just as I love you—a love as sweet and clean and honest, as reason is sweet and clean and honest. I only want to make you happier. The

happier you are, the happier I shall be. You can't be angry with me for wanting to make you and yours happy. You might see me sometimes. It would be to lengthen my days if you would."

"Daniel——"

"I guess what you're going to say. He's not satisfied with things as they are. Well, leave that for the moment. He's safe enough. Safer and luckier than he knows."

"I wasn't thinking of that. I was thinking what he would say if he heard you."

"Don't tell him. Never make a man miserable for nothing. Another man couldn't understand me. But a woman can. You can, and you do. You're not angry with me. You couldn't be. You haven't the heart to be angry with me. Think what a poor wretch I am. I saw you once before you were married. I actually saw you up at Dunnagoat cottage. Saw you and went away and forgot it! 'Twas a sin to have seen you and forgotten you, Sarah Jane; but I'm terribly punished."

"What wild nonsense you tell whenever you meet me!"

"It was after that woman jilted me. I had no eyes then for anything or anybody. I was blind and you were hidden from me, though I looked into your face."

"Enough to make you hate all of us. She must have been a bad lot—also a proper fool."

They talked in a desultory manner and he spoke with great praise of her husband and promised fair things for the future. Then he returned to her and strove to be personal, and she kept him as much as possible to the general incidents of his visit to Kent. He told her of the cousins there, and described them, and explained how they were mere shadows compared with the reality of her. He spoke of the crops, of the orchards, strawberry-beds, osier-beds, and green hop-bines, whose fruit ripened to golden-green before the picking. But to return from the fertile garden to the stony wilderness was the work of a word; and before she

could prevent it, Daniel's wife found herself again upon his lips.

Under White Hill he left her, and she went straight homeward, while he made a wide detour and rode into the farm near two hours later.

That day John Prout found his master vigorous and cheerful. He detailed the fact gladly, and they asked themselves why it was; but only Sarah Jane guessed, and she did not enlighten them.

She could not, and the necessity for a sort of secrecy hurt her. She thought very long and deeply upon the subject, but saw no answer to Woodrow's arguments. He had frankly told her that he loved her; and while her mind stood still at the shock, he had asked her how it was possible to blame him for so doing. He had gone away into the world that he might seek peace, and he had found none. Instead, she had filled his sleeping and waking thoughts, and the mere memory of her had proved strong enough to stand as a sure shield and barrier between him and all other women. His love was an essence as pure and sweet as the air of the Moor. He had solemnly sworn it; and she dwelt on that, for it comforted her. She retraced other passages of their conversation, and marked how again and again it returned to her. And not only her did he discuss, but her husband also, and her child, and the future welfare of them all.

She fought with herself and blamed herself for being uneasy and cast down. What made her fearful? Why did sex move her to suspicion before his frank protestations? He was a very honest and truth-loving man. He hated hypocrisy, and cant, and the letter that killed; he stood for the spirit that quickened; he longed to see the world wiser, happier and saner. Such a fellow-creature was not to be feared or mistrusted.

She told herself that she ought to love him, as he loved her; and presently she assured herself that she did do so. He was a gentleman, delicate of speech, earnest, and—

his eyes were beautiful to her. She found herself dwelling upon his outward parts, his gaze, his features, his thin, brown hands.

Prosperity must spring out of Woodrow's regard for Daniel, otherwise the professed friendship was vain. She assured herself of this; then she endeavoured to lift the problem of her mind into the domain of religion. Her husband worked hard to make her religious; now she brought her difficulties on to that higher plane, and strove to find more light upon them.

Nothing hurt her here. Religion, as she understood it, spoke clearly and did not reprove her. She must love her neighbour as herself, and seek to let a little of her own full cup of happiness flow over to brighten the hearts of those less blessed. The sole difficulty was in her teacher, not in her guides. How would Daniel approve such a large policy? She asked him. But she did not ask him quite honestly. She knew it, and she was very unhappy afterwards. And then she told herself that the end had justified the means; and then she doubted. And so the first real sorrow of her life dawned, became for a season permanent, and shamed her in her own eyes.

"I met Mr. Woodrow to-day, Daniel," she said, "and walked a bit beside his horse as I came back from Lydford. I thought once he was going to begin about you, and hoped to hear the good news that he meant to lift you up at last; but he didn't actually say it. Only he asked me to see him sometimes when I brought in the butter of a Friday—just to bring news of Ruddyford."

"Well, you do, don't you? If there's any message, Prout always sends it by you—by you, or anybody that happens to be going in."

"Yes; only I generally see Susan, or leave the message with Hephzibah. But Mr. Woodrow said he'd like me to call myself if he was in. And my first thought was 'no'; then I saw he was so much in earnest, that I said 'yes.'"

"You'll do no such thing, and 'twas very bold for him to ask it, or you to grant."

"Of course I won't, if you don't like; but listen a minute, Daniel. He was kinder about you than ever I remember him to be. 'Don't you fear for your husband,' he said. 'I'm a quiet man, but I'm wide awake. I know him. I know him better than Prout knows him, though Prout's never tired of praising him. Leave your husband's future in my hands. I mean to make the man in my own good time.' That's actually what he said, Dan. And he knew very well that I should tell you."

Brendon thought awhile.

"That's very good news, and a great weight off my mind," he answered. "But why did he tell you? Let him tell me, if 'tis true. And that's neither here nor there, so far as your seeing him goes. Anyway, I forbid you to call at his house again."

CHAPTER X

KIT'S STEPS

THE inevitable thing happened, and, after numerous evasions, Sarah Jane consented to meet Hilary Woodrow, that he might talk to her without restraint or fear of any eavesdropper.

Not until many months had passed did she agree to his

petition; then, on a day when the year again turned to autumn, they met beside the river at a lonely place known as Kit's Steps.

The farmer had found Jarratt's cottage suit him extremely well, and, moved by more motives than he declared, continued to rent it. For a month only, during high summer, he returned to Ruddyford; but afterwards, though he rode over twice or thrice a week to his farm, Hilary dwelt in Lydford. Meantime Jarratt Weekes had married Mary Churchward, and since the master of Ruddyford offered him a very generous rent for the cottage, Mr. Churchward's son-in-law, as a man of business, felt not justified in refusing. For a further term of a year he let his house, and by arrangement, lived with the schoolmaster during that period. His wife little liked the plan, but was not consulted. Jarratt, however, promised her that in the following June, at latest, she should occupy her own dwelling; and with that undertaking Mary had to be content.

Now, on an afternoon of September, Sarah Jane came to Kit's Steps to pick blackberries and meet Hilary Woodrow.

Here Lyd drops through a steep dingle, over a broken wall of stone; and then, by pools and shallows and many a little flashing fall, descends with echoing thunder into the fern-clad gloom of the gorge beneath.

At Kit's Steps the river gushes out from a cleft in the rock, and her waters, springing clear of the barrier, sweep down in a fan-shaped torrent of foam, all crimped and glittering, like a woman's hair. But the waterfall is white as snow, and, like snow, seems to pile itself upon a deep pool beneath. Hence Lyd curls and dances away all streaked and beaded with light. Round about, shaggy brakes of furze and thorn drop by steep declivities to stream-side, and the grey crags that tower above are decked with oak and rowan and ash. At the cleft whence the stream leaps out, a curtain of moss hangs down, and great wealth of ferns and lush green things prosper. Briars dance in the fall; and now they spring aloft, as the weight of the water leaves

them, and now are caught by the sparkling torrent and bent again. The dark rocks, eternally washed by spray, shine like black glass; at autumn time the lesser gorses flame; cushions of heather creep to the edge of the low precipices and fledge each boulder; while loud upon the ear there sounds the roar of tumbling Lyd. It is a place cheerful in sunshine, solemn at evening or under the darkness of storm; but always singular and always beautiful. No spirit of fear or sorrow haunts it, despite the myth of one whose griefs were ended here on a day forgotten.

Hilary was first at the Steps, and found a sheltered spot under an oak tree, where mossy stones made an easy couch. Here impatiently he awaited Sarah Jane; and at length she appeared with a basket half full of ripe blackberries.

At first she was uneasy; but he quickly made her forget the adventure of the moment, by interesting her mind with other matters.

"You ought to begin by praising me," he said, "for being so exceedingly good when I was at Ruddyford. I only spoke to you thrice all through that long month. At what a cost I avoided you, you'll never guess!"

"I was the happier that you did. I thought you was growing sensible—about things."

"Sarah Jane, there's no sense nor sanity for me away from you. I never knew, till I went away to London, what you were to me. I said to myself, 'She interested me in women again, because she's so lovely'; but it wasn't that at all. I soon found out you yourself interested me, and only you. The light dawned, and first I feared; then I feared no more. Now I glory in loving you. It is far and away the best thing that's ever happened to me."

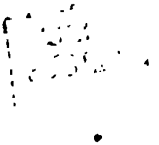
"Was this what you wanted to say? It only makes me miserable—Hilary."

"Thank you for calling me that."

"You made me promise to."

"I didn't make you. We can't make our gods do what we want. We can only pray to them. What a curse it

KIT'S STEPS. [*To face p.* 190.



is that we weren't born under a different star, Sarah Jane. For me, I mean. If your fearless mind had only been taught otherwise—but that's vain to regret now."

"Always the same with you—trying to teach me things too hard for me, and mix up right and wrong."

"But I don't do anything of the sort. Right is a great deal to me. In this matter right and wrong are not the problem at all. I'm only mourning custom and convention —not the clash of right and wrong."

The sexual relation had never occupied this woman's mind apart from marriage. Now he made it do so, and very leisurely, very carefully, explained what he meant by "custom." His manner was light and bantering; none the less, he revealed to her his own deep interest in this discussion. He was a special pleader. He laughed at religious interference in this connection; told her that it was an outcome of yesterday; that foreign races shared wives and husbands; that where life was easy, many men had many wives; where life was hard, one woman might take several spouses.

"Marriage laws," he said, "have always been a matter of physical propriety and convenience. Temperature and latitude, the food supply, the possibilities of population, and the dearly bought wisdom of the community, have regulated it—not any false nonsense about right and wrong."

He told her nothing that was untrue; but everything he said was an indirect petition, and she knew it. She was not shocked at the facts he placed before her; indeed, they interested her; but she refused to let him influence her own opinion. She contrasted Hilary's information with the fierce and fiery ideas of her husband on the subject. Between the two her own mind, through forces of education, inclined to Daniel; yet she saw no great horror in a wider freedom.

"'Tis wonderful how opposite men's thoughts can be," she said. "You and my husband do look at life almost as differently as the people you be telling about. 'Tis all one

to you, so long as folk do what's good to themselves, without hurting other folk; but to him—why, the very name of evil be evil's self! Yesternight he was talking to a tramp who took one of your turnips; and Daniel saw him. And he said that, according to Christ, to look over a hedge with hunger after a root was as bad as pulling and eating it."

"Doesn't it scorch you, living with such a narrow spirit?"

"'Twould scorch me to make him unhappy."

"That you must never do, Sarah Jane."

He began to talk again of the subject in his mind. But she begged him to desist.

"Leave it," she said. "What's the sense of telling me all these curious things about the way people go into marriage? Our way is so good as any, surely?"

"I only want to enlarge your ideas, and prove my argument: that there's no right and wrong in the matter, only the question of fitness and custom. You're too large-minded to care a button for peddling quibbles. But leave it, if you like. What you want to do, before all else, is to make your husband happy; and so do I. Then we'll talk of that, for there we quite agree."

"Thank you," she said. "'Tis more to me than anything."

"And you'll feel a little kind to me for coming to it?"

"Yes, I will. I always feel kind to you, because I'm sorry for you."

"Then 'tis my turn to thank you; and from my heart I do. You know why I'm going to talk of Daniel?"

"For honesty, and because he deserves it."

"Yes—and for love, and because you wish it."

"That spoils all, Mr. Woodrow."

"Call me Hilary, or I'll not go on. There's one more thing you must remember—in fairness to me. All good comes from God—doesn't it? Grant Daniel is right about a God, and you'll grant all good comes from Him."

"Why can't you say that good things come out of us ourselves? So you have said before to-day."

"And so I say again. But we must think with your husband's mind over this. If I lift him up a bit—what then?"

"He'll thank God for certain."

"Exactly. He'll be the better for advancement—body and soul. He's got a bit peevish of late. Success will sweeten him and make him a gentler man."

"He feels he's not made enough of at Ruddyford."

"Well, I promote him. I answer his prayers."

"And perhaps his God will pay you well. For Dan's very likely right."

"That's the point—I'm coming to that. I expect no payment—not from God; because I happen to know that God is an idea and not a fact. Therefore——"

"What?"

He was silent awhile. Her face changed, and he saw that she had caught his meaning. He gave her no time to dwell upon it then, but plunged into another subject suddenly.

"Nothing can happen that is not for good—if your husband is right. Always remember that, Sarah Jane. God rules everything and rules everything wisely and perfectly. Therefore, whatever you do, you are working out His pattern—whether you are making the world happier or more miserable. Now I'll ask you one question about something altogether different. Last Sunday I read the story of David and Uriah and Uriah's wife. You know it?"

"Yes, of course."

"Have you ever thought about it?"

"Only to be terrible sorry for the woman. 'Tis awful to think what she must have suffered if she loved her husband."

"I'm always sorry for Uriah. 'Twas a cruel way out of the difficulty. If I had been David I should have lifted that noble soldier's head high in the world, and studied his ambitions, and striven to make his life happier."

"David knowed the man better maybe. He reckoned 'twould be safer to put him out of the way—perhaps even kinder, too—if he was such another as my man."

"Don't think it. David had merely to keep Uriah ignorant. Many things, not the least evil in themselves, only become so by the revelation of them. Prevent those who will think them wrong from hearing of them, and no harm is done. I love another man's wife. Well and good. Is that a crime? Can I help it by an effort of will? Suppose that other man's wife is sorry for me, and fond of me too? Suppose that she finds me interesting, and useful to enlarge her mind, and helpful to throw light on the difficulties of life owing to my long years of study? Is that wrong of her? Can she help it? Can you help it, Sarah Jane?"

"I'll never come to you no more, then. I can help that, anyway."

"No, you can't help even that. You must come to me if you love—Daniel. I'm his destiny. I'm the maker of his future. His light shall shine, and he shall be a happy man, and do good and great work in the world long after I'm dead and gone. I'm only the poor means, yet vital. A stone counts for less than the tool it sharpens; but the steel couldn't do its work without the stone. You—you are your husband's light, and his life, and his salvation. You shall give him his heart's desire if——"

He broke off, was silent a moment, then asked a question.

"What would Bathsheba have said if David had put it so?"

"Depends on the sort she was. Might was right for her, poor woman. She had no choice."

"She'd have spoken according to the reality of her love for Uriah," he said positively. "She'd have said, 'I am in the hands of my God, and if good things may come to my husband through me, 'tis my joy and glory as a loving wife to take them to him.' Can God do wrong?"

He stopped and looked at her.

Her bosom panted and she grew weeping-ripe.

"Never—never, wrong or right. 'Tis cruel to put it so. He'd rather cut my throat with his own hand. He'd——"

"But think—so much for so little. I want so little, and yet not little, for I ask what's worth more than all the money I've got in the world. Kiss me—once, Sarah Jane—only once—and I'll do more for your husband than his highest dreams or hopes. For love of him kiss me—not for love of me. Would I ask you to do an evil thing? Is it evil to put new life into a very sorrowful man and purify every drop of blood in an unhappy heart? Is it evil to make the sick whole again at a touch? Didn't Daniel's Lord and Master do as much a thousand times——?"

She stared and turned pale, save for her lips. Twin tears glittered in her eyes. He put his arm round her swiftly and kissed her. For the briefest moment he held her, then he leapt to his feet and drew a great breath.

"If I did that often, I, too, should believe in God!" he said.

A moment later he had hurried away, and she sat solitary and tearful there for nearly an hour.

Through intervals of wild uncertainty the things that he had spoken returned to her memory, and she clutched at them, like the drowning at straws. To her husband and his opinions she also turned. The outlook of neither man was admirable to her now. She sickened at both surveys, and wished herself a maiden again.

Then, with great yearning, she yearned after Daniel, and rose and hurried off to her home. Before she reached it her husband actually met her. Upon White Hill he came, with his face to Lydford, and when she stood by his side he stopped and helped himself from her basket.

"Brave berries, sure enough," he said. "I wish I could carry 'em back for 'e; but Tommy Bates runned over five minutes agone with a message from farmer. He wants to see me at once, and I mustn't waste a moment. Can't say what's in the wind, I'm sure."

He went his way, and Sarah Jane returned to Ruddyford.

As she arrived, a little boy came out. Tommy Bates had just enjoyed a good tea, and the jam that had smeared his bread left many traces about his mouth.

"Mr. Woodrow catched sight of me in the street by the post-office, an' ordered me to come out-along and tell Mr. Brendon as he wanted him this very minute," explained the child.

CHAPTER XI

TROUBLE AT AMICOMBE HILL

TABITHA PROUT, despite her general contempt of the married state and those duties that belonged to it, awoke into a very active love for Mrs. Brendon's baby; and Gregory Daniel, doubtless appreciating the importance of having Tabitha upon his side, did all that he could to increase this regard. So it came about that when the little boy's mother was called away, as sometimes happened for a few hours at a time, the child found a friend in the old maid. She enjoyed to have the baby beside her at Ruddyford kitchen, and Daniel foretold that, as soon as the infant could steer a steady course from his mother's cottage to the farm, Tabitha would quickly find him a nuisance.

Brendon returned from his master in a very happy and exalted frame of mind. To Sarah Jane only he imparted his news; and it was not until nightfall that he did so.

Then he chose the curious form of a prayer for his intelligence, and while they knelt together and he prayed aloud, as his custom occasionally was, she heard for the first time, in her husband's thanksgiving to Heaven, how Hilary Woodrow had kept his promise.

"O Almighty Father, I thank Thee for touching this man's heart to lift me up and advance my earthly welfare. And I pray Thee to be on my side always, that I may do wisely with Thy good gifts and turn more and more to Thee and trust Thee. And let me do worthy work and never bate my mind from thinking how to help Ruddyford and advance the prosperity of Mr. Woodrow. I thank Thee humbly, O God, for all Thy mercies, through Jesus Christ. Amen."

Before she slept he told his wife that Hilary had added ten shillings a week to his money.

"I must go on as I'm going, so he said," explained Daniel; "but his eyes are opened at last. I gathered from him that he quite understood what I am here. I must give him time, and all will come right. It's a lot of money, and better things in store, I do think. 'Tis the beginning of great blessings, Sarah Jane."

She expressed her delight; but when another morning came and the man awakened, like a joyful giant, to run his course, it was not only happiness, but the cloudy pain of a memory unhappy that dawned in his wife's spirit. Two different emotions pressed down upon her heart: remorse at the thing never to be recalled, and wonder at the price. The remorse waned and the wonder grew.

She mourned and rejoiced and went on with her life, into which henceforth Hilary Woodrow intruded.

Then her abstracted soul was rudely shaken out of itself, for one day there came running from the Moor a boy with an evil message. He had been picking whortleberries near the peat-works, when a man hailed him, and, approaching the ruin, he encountered Mr. Friend.

"He's cruel bad, seemingly. In a great heat—so he tells me. I was to let Mrs. Brendon know as he was ill.

He'm short of victuals, and drink, too, and I was to say as if you could bring up a drop of spirits in a bottle, no doubt 'twould soon put him right. And I was to have sixpence, please, for coming. He hadn't got any small money by him for the moment; but he said he'll pay you back presently."

In ten minutes Sarah Jane was hastening over the Moor, and soon afterwards Daniel, carrying a basket, set out after her. He had visited the farm and collected such things as Tabitha advised. The man made light of his load, however, and soon overtook Sarah Jane.

"Don't you fret," he said. "You know what he is. The wonder is he haven't been struck down a score of times ere this. So careless of hisself as a child. 'Tis a bit of a tissick on the lungs, I reckon. Us'll soon have him to rights again."

"If he'm bad, I shall bide along with him, Dan. I can't leave him here—not for anything in the world."

"Of course not. I shouldn't ax it. Very like I'll bide too. If we think he's bad enough for a doctor, I'll go off for one myself."

She thanked him gratefully, and they spoke on indifferent subjects to calm their hearts. Sarah Jane hesitated not to praise Hilary Woodrow for his recent action. Indeed, she felt they owed him a very real debt of gratitude, and said so many times.

"You're almost too affectionate and kind to everybody," her husband declared. "Pushed so far as you push it, 'tis weakness."

"How can that be, Daniel? Even you hold it right to love your neighbour as yourself."

"You can strain that into foolishness," he answered. "And you are prone to do it. 'Tis a sort of gush in you. You mean nought—yet there 'tis. See how you look at a tramp that comes begging, and how Tabitha Prout looks at him. She tells the truth in her eyes, and shows her contempt of the rascal; you look as if you doted on his lazy

carcase, and would gladly pour out the fat of the larder for him."

"I know 'tis so. I be fond of my kind—just because they be my kind, I think. I like 'em all—men, women, childern."

"So you should do—in a general spirit of religion, because they are made in God's image."

"No!" she said vehemently. "Not that—not that. Because they are made in mine!"

He showed discontent.

"You won't come to see the truth, talk as I may."

"Look at the night when you heard our good news," she answered. "That shows the difference betwixt us. You was thanking God so deep and true, that you hadn't a thought for Mr. Woodrow. You was so wrapped up in heaven that you never seemed to think 'twas a man on earth—a creature like yourself—that had lifted you up. All the credit went to God Almighty—all. Not a drop to farmer. Can't us poor human souls have a bit of praise when our hearts are generous and we do good things?"

So she argued in all honesty and out of a passionate abstract love for her kind. At that moment she forgot the circumstances and the nature of the bargain. She only begged that her husband should bestow a little of his gratitude on his earthly master.

"As for that, a good human being be only the middle-man between God and us," he said. "The Book says all good comes from Him, and only from Him. Same as evil comes from the Prince of Evil into man's heart."

"Then what be we but a pack of dancing dolls with them two—God an' the Dowl—fighting for the strings? Is that all you'd make of us? Is that all you'd make of me? You'll live to know different, Daniel."

"You fly away so," he said. "Of course there's Free Will, an' a very great subject 'tis; an' Mr. Matherson be going to preach upon it next Sunday, I'm glad to say. So I hope we'll both win a bit of light when he does."

Sarah Jane said no more. Strange thoughts, not wholly

unhappy, worked in her heart, and she felt frank joy to think that, though Daniel Brendon had not paid Hilary for his kindness, somebody had done so.

So the husband and wife each failed to grasp the reality of the other. While she thus reflected, he was busying himself with how to earn this handsome increase of salary. A dozen plans began to develop in his mind. Only the inertia of old routine and custom still opposed his various enterprises. But now had dawned a promise of power, and he was full of hope.

They reached the mournful habitation of Gregory Friend to find him very ill. He sat by his fire with a couple of sacks over his shoulders, and complained of great pain in the lower chest and back, with difficulty of breathing.

"It came on two days ago, and I thought I'd throw it off, as I have many an ache before," he said. "But it gained on me. Then this morning, with light, I began to wonder what I'd better do, for I felt some deep mischief had got hold upon me. I put on my clothes and thought to try and get down to Ruddyford, as the shortest road to people. But by good chance there came a boy picking hurts, and no doubt he reached you."

They spoke together for five minutes. Then Daniel started for Bridgetstowe to get a doctor, and Sarah Jane attended to her father. She got him out of his clothes and into bed; she built a big wood fire that set the moisture glimmering on the walls of Gregory's hovel; she heated water and made him drink a stiff glass of hot spirits; and she set about a dish of broth, the ingredients of which Daniel had brought in the basket. Mr. Friend revived presently, but his pain was considerable and he found it difficult to breathe.

"Give me some more brandy," he said. "It lifts up the strength. I did ought to have a plaster put upon my back without a doubt, for I mind a man up here being took just like this. And they put a fiery plaster on him and drawed the evil out."

"There's nought but bread to make it of," said Sarah Jane. "Or else peat."

His eyes brightened.

"That's a good thought—a capital idea! Fetch a bit of the soft and make it red-hot in a saucepan, and 'twill be a very useful thing—better than mustard, very like."

She did her best, and presently Mr. Friend, with a mass of hot peat pressed against his side in a piece of Sarah Jane's flannel petticoat, declared himself much easier.

"'Tis life every way," he said. "This be a great discovery, and very like, if doctors come to know about it, 'twill go further than all they bird-witted engineers to set Amicombe Hill up again."

He stuck to it that the peat was doing him immense good. He drank a little broth when Sarah Jane brought it to him. Then he wandered in his speech, and then for a time he kept silence.

"Better for certain—better for certain now," he said at intervals.

Presently he asked after his grandchild.

"Must have him up here a lot next summer when the weather's good," he said.

He seemed easier presently, and his daughter had leisure to think of herself. She loved him dearly, and, since marriage, the gentleness and simplicity of his character had more impressed her than formerly. Before, she had no experience by which to measure his virtues. Now, with a larger knowledge of men and life, she could appreciate the single-hearted Gregory, sympathize with him and perceive the pathos of his life and futile hope.

She talked to him now very openly of her own secret tribulations and the difficulties of late forced upon her by her husband's master.

"He's lifted Daniel up, father; and Daniel have thanked God ever since; but—but 'tis me he ought to thank."

Then she proceeded, told her father of the scene at Kit's Steps, and asked him to help her.

"Do nothing to anger Daniel," he said. "You're playing with death and worse. This can't come to good, and I only hope to God you haven't gone too far already. That man Brendon as—as—build me up another hot poultice, will 'e, while I talk?—Brendon is a lion of the Lord; and he'd be a lion on his own account if anything happened to cross him in his den. Have 'e ever marked his eyes, Sarah Jane? But of course you have. They glow sometimes in the dimpsy light, like a dog's do glow. When you see that in a human's eyes, it means that, down under, there's a large share of burning fire in 'em. If Dan thought that he'd been wronged, not heaven or earth would stand between him and payment."

He began to cough and held his hands to his head.

"'Tis like red-hot wires going through the brain," he said. "But 'twill be better presently. I'm in a proper heat now. I've been praying to God to fetch out the sweat on me. Now the peat have done it."

"Don't talk no more, dear father. Bide quiet a bit an' try an' see if you can't sleep."

"So I will, then; but there's two things I must say first. One is that you must go away from Ruddyford. Mark me, 'tis life or death if the wind's in that quarter and Woodrow's after you. He's a desperate sort of man because he've got nobody to think of but himself—no family to consider—no wife or child—nothing. You must go—go—far ways off, where he can't come at you."

He stopped, and shut his eyes. Then, when Sarah Jane hoped that he slept, her father spoke again.

"The other thing is my knife—the famous one wi' the ivory handle and long, narrer blade, that I use when I do my chemical work. It have a history. My uncle fetched it from a foreign land, and it be made of a steel called Damascus—the best in the world; and there's gold letters let into it in a foreign tongue. 'Tis in the works, along with a few other things, Sarah Jane. My watch be there—not that 'tis any use, for it haven't gone for a year. Still, if the

worst comes, I'd like little Greg to have 'em from me—also the shares in the Company. He'll live to see them a useful bit of money. And the rest must go to you and Dan."

"Don't—don't be talking. You've got to get well again quick," she said. Then she took away his plaster and brought another hot from the saucepan.

"A great invention," he said. "A great invention. If I'm spared, the thing shall be known far and wide afore long."

He dozed between fits of coughing, and moved uneasily in a semi-dream. Then came the sound of a galloping horse, and Sarah hastened to the door.

"Can't be doctor yet, unless by happy fortune Dan ran across him," she said.

But it was not the doctor. The bearded and grave countenance of Mr. Henry Norseman met Sarah Jane's eyes.

"Just met Brendon," he explained, "and hearing that Mr. Friend was in peril, I come up so hard as my hoss would go, to see if I could comfort him. I've been light at more death-beds than one in my time, including my own father's, and often a word helps the wanderer in the Valley."

"He'm not in the Valley, or anywheres near it," answered the woman stoutly. "But come in by all means. If you could bide with him a little, I'll look about, and set his living chamber in order, and try to make an egg pudding for him."

Mr. Norseman, who knew Gregory and his daughter but slightly, now dismounted, tethered his horse, and presently sat by the sufferer; while Sarah Jane, glad of the opportunity, worked hard to make the dismal hole that was her father's home a little clean and a little comfortable.

"Very kind of you to call, I'm sure," said Mr. Friend, when his daughter had gone. "Don't tell her yet, for I may be wrong; but I'm very much afraid 'tis all up with me. 'Tis awful deep in me. I got properly wetted two days ago, and went to sleep afore the fire."

"Where there's life there's hope," said Mr. Norseman.

"But you're wise to face it. I wish you'd been more of a church-worshipper, Friend."

"Well, well. I've worked hard and tried to do my duty."

"But more goes to life than that. What are man's days without faith? Here you've lived for years, more like a wild savage of the woods than a devout Christian. I wish you'd planned your life wiser, Friend, I do indeed."

"So do I. So do all. So will yourself, when you'm down."

"As to that, I think I can look forward in hope. But you—you see, you put this life first always. Your thoughts ran upon making a fortune out of fuel in this world. You never thought about making a fortune in the next, I'm afraid."

Gregory laughed painfully.

"Plenty of free fuel where you think I'm going," he said.

Mr. Norseman was hurt.

"You ought not to jest about a sacred subject—never—and least of all at a time like this," he answered. "You're wise to face it—as we all should—but not in a ribald spirit. Don't die with a jest on your lips, Gregory Friend."

The other moved and groaned, but with present misery not in future fear.

"For your comfort I can tell you that hell's not what it was," said Henry Norseman kindly. "The more understanding way with respect to it, so parson says, is to believe that it won't last for ever. 'Tis a noble discovery, if true. No man was better pleased to hear the sermon he preached about it than I was. I can say that honestly. If hell's only a matter of centuries and not eternity—think what an uplifting thought for a death-bed! I don't say you're on your death-bed, Friend, and I hope you're not. But some day you will be for certain. And 'tis a great thought that the Lord may be found so forgiving that He'll abolish the place of torment once and for all—so soon as justice have been done. Justice first, of course. Even you, as can't be

called a church member, or even chapel—very likely a thousand years will see you through it—or less."

"God is Love, my mother used to tell," said the sufferer.

"And for that reason we have a right to be hopeful," declared the churchwarden. "And I'm for limiting hell-fire heart and soul; though, I warn you, everybody ban't of the same opinion. 'Tis justice against love weighed in the balance of the Almighty Mind; and ban't for us worms to say which will come out top."

Sarah Jane returned a little later, and found her father somewhat agitated.

"This man reckons I shan't have more than a thousand years in hell, if I'm lucky, Sarah," he said. "'Twas kind of him to come and lift my thoughts. And I said that I'd like to be buried up here 'pon Amicombe Hill, in the peat; but he reckons 'twould be against high religion."

"A most profane wish without a doubt," answered Mr. Norseman; "and as a Christian man, let alone other reasons, I shall object to it."

Gregory's daughter looked at him, then she turned to her father. "Try and eat a little bit of this, dear heart," she said. "'Twill strengthen you, I'm sure."

A moment later she drew herself up, regarded Mr. Norseman, and pointed to the entrance with a simple gesture.

"And you—you that could talk of hell to this poor stricken man, whose good life don't harbour one dark hour—you, that can bring your poor church stuff to my father—I'll ax you to leave him if you please. When he dies—and may it be far off from him—he'll go where the large, gentle hearts go—to the God that made him and that watches over the least. He's done man's work and been faithful. He's been loving and kind to all. Not here, nor in heaven, can any harsh word be spoke against my dear, dear father."

Mr. Norseman pulled his black beard and began to get annoyed.

"This isn't at all the way that Brendon would speak," he said—from the door.

"No," she answered. "He's a man, and strong in the arm. He wouldn't speak: he'd do. He'd take you by the neck and fling you back into Lydford—and your horse after you."

"You'll be sorry for this disgraceful behaviour," said the churchwarden. "'Tisn't a nice way to treat a religious person who rides four miles out of his way to comfort the sick."

"Rides four mile out of his way to bring hell-fire to a better man than himself," she retorted hotly; then Mr. Norseman turned his back and went to his horse.

Gregory chid Sarah Jane, but she would not let him talk, renewed his poultices and strove to make him eat and drink. He could, however, do neither, and he was wandering in his speech and partly unconscious before another hour had passed.

Time stretched interminably, and not until the evening of the day did a medical man arrive on horseback.

He had guessed from Daniel's description of the case what was amiss, and had directed Brendon to bring certain things to the peat-works as quickly as possible.

Sarah Jane watched while the physician made his examination. Then he took her into the other room, and told her that her father was dying.

CHAPTER XII

THE HERMIT PASSES

JARRATT WEEKES came into his father's home with an item of news.

"That old madman at the peat-works—Gregory Friend—is about done for," he announced. "I met Brendon yesterday, running about for a doctor. I couldn't feel too sorry myself, and angered him. 'Wouldn't you do as much for your father-in-law?' he asked me; and I thought of Adam Churchward, and said I wouldn't."

"A man didn't ought to marry his wife's family," admitted Mrs. Weekes. "But you'm too hard without a doubt. Well, if Friend be going, there's an end of the peat-works for evermore. 'Twill be the last breath of life out of the place."

"All the same," said her son, "there's no call for that long-limbed man to reprove me, as if I was a creature not made of flesh and blood. He's so dreadful serious—can't see any light play of the mind."

"A deadly earnest creature, no doubt," admitted his mother. "I wonder if Sarah Jane will be any the better for Gregory's going? Probably not. But come to think of it, they've had their luck of late. Her man's getting what I should call fancy wages myself."

"He's worth it," ventured Philip Weekes. "The things he does—Joe Tapson was telling me. Even Joe, who's a jealous man, and didn't take at all kindly to Daniel's rise—even Joe admits that he's a wonder."

"Bah!" said Jarratt. "He's not half so wonderful as a three-horse-power steam engine, and can't do half the work of it."

"You're wrong there," answered his father. "He's got plenty of brains in his head, and Prout himself has let it

be known that them alterations he begged to be allowed to make will certainly be for the better, though he stood out against them at the time."

"We're friends now, anyway," continued his son. "I'm not saying he's not a very useful man; but I do say, and always shall, that he wasn't good enough for Sarah Jane."

"Us don't want to hear her name no more," declared his mother—"not on your lips, that is. 'Tis Mary now, and she's a proper girl too. Where she got her wits from I never can make out. 'Twasn't from her mother, for the poor soul was only moon to schoolmaster's sun, and hadn't more sense than, please God, she should have. That gert, hulking chap, William, as paints his silly little pictures, be so like his mother in character as two peas, though he carries his father's body."

"Mary hasn't got no higher opinion of 'em than you have," declared Jarratt. "She can suffer her father, but not the 'Infant.' She'm twice the man he is."

"For my part, I'd sooner do with him than schoolmaster," answered Hephzibah. "Lord save us—such an empty drum never was. Why, to hear his great, important voice, you'd think he'd met a lion in the path. Moses—when he comed down from the Mount—couldn't have felt more full of news. And what do it all come to? Nothing at all—save that he's just drunk a dish of tea round the corner with some other old fool; or that one of the schoolchilder's got the mumps; or some such twaddle."

"Not that us should seek to set Mary against her own father, however," said Philip mildly.

"Be quiet, you mouse of a man!" answered his wife. "Who wants to set children against parents, I should like to know? If a child be set against parents, 'tis the silly parents' own fault—as you ought to understand—nobody better."

The family met again that night, and Susan, coming across from Mr. Woodrow's for some butter, brought the expected news with her.

"Mr. Gregory Friend was took off about midday," she said. "I met young Billy Luke—him as he apprenticed to Mr. Medland, the undertaker. He knowed all about it. They be building his coffin this minute, and 'twill be taken up to-morrow morning; and 'tis ordained that poor Mr. Friend shall be drove on the trolley that he used to work up and down the line with his peat."

"Quite right," said Mr. Weekes. "For that matter, there's no other way they could fetch him down. Well, well—who'd have thought of him going?"

"They've allowed Mr. Brendon to have the corpse took to the vicarage; and the funeral party will walk from there; and he's to be buried Friday; and two wreaths have come in already, if you'll believe it," continued Susan. "One from them people at High Down, that Mr. Friend did use to keep in firing free of cost; and one from somebody unknown."

"Us will do the same," declared Philip. "There should be some Michaelmas daisies near out, but I haven't looked at the front garden for a fortnight."

"If you had," said Mrs. Weekes, "you'd have found that owing to your mazed foolishness in leaving the gate open a while back, Huggins' cow got in, an' the daring hussy ate our Machaelmas daisies down to the roots afore I could force her out again. All the same, we'll do something, else Sarah Jane won't send us a memorial card; and I like to see them black-edged cards stuck in the parlour looking-glass. They be good for us, and remind us that a time will come when they'll be printing ours."

"Leave that to me," said Philip. "Not your card—God forbid!" he added hastily, "but the wreath. I thought well of poor Friend—very well—a most hopeful creature. 'Twas only back-along, at his grandchild's christening, that me and him had a great tell over things in general."

"If 'tis a boughten wreath, I'd be wishful to put a shilling from my savings to it," said Susan. "I'm terrible fond of Sarah Jane, and she'll be cruel sad for him."

They rolled the morsel of other folks' sorrow upon their tongues.

Mrs. Weekes surprised nobody by deciding to attend the interment. A funeral was an event she rarely denied herself, if it was possible to be present. She found the ceremony restful and suggestive.

"You and me will go, Jar," she said. "You can't come, master, because you'll have to be on your rounds against market-day. But Jar and me will stand for the family."

"And me," said Susan. "I can borrow a bit of black easily from a lot of girls."

"I want to go," began Philip. "I really want to go. As a rule funerals ban't all to me they are to you, my dear; but this is out of the common. Yes, I must ax of you to let me go, out of respect to poor Friend."

Thereupon Mrs. Weekes took the opportunity and her voice rose to a familiar and penetrating pitch.

"Nought to you if we starve," she began. "You—amusing yourself on Friday of all days—and the people along your beat waiting and wondering, and coming down on us next week for damages; and me going empty-handed to market Saturday, to be the laughing-stock of Devon and Cornwall; and——"

Here Philip, with deprecatory attitudes, withdrew.

For once the man stood firm, and having started on his rounds at dawn upon the burial day of Gregory Friend, he was able to pay final respect to the peat-master and be numbered with the mourners.

Their company was small, but among them stood one most unexpected. Hilary Woodrow had sent a wreath the night before, and its beauty occasioned comment and admiration among those who saw it; but that he should come to the funeral was a great surprise. Come he did, however, and attended the opening portion of the service; but he did not join the party in the churchyard.

Brendon waited to see the grave filled; then he returned

to his wife. She went with her little boy to the house of Mrs. Weekes after the funeral; and there he presently found her.

Hephzibah insisted on Sarah Jane drinking a glass of brown sherry, while the child ate a sponge-cake.

"Pale sherry-wine be right at a funeral—not dark," said the market-woman; "but, at times like this, the right and wrong of such a small thing really don't count for much to a sad heart." Then she turned to Gregory, the child.

"You darling boy! Behaved so beautiful, he did, with his curls a-shining like gold over his poor little black coat! 'Tis one in ten thousand, as I said from the first. I could wish vicar had read the lesson himself, instead of letting schoolmaster do it. But Churchward's always turned on to the lessons nowadays. 'Tis like a bumble-bee reading, to my ear. And Farmer Woodrow there too! Fancy that!"

Sarah Jane nodded. She had suffered very bitter grief in this loss, but she showed little of it except to her husband. Only he knew the extent and depth of her sorrow. He had asked her not to come to the funeral, but she chose to do so. Pale and dry-eyed, Sarah Jane endured. Of her sorrow very little appeared. She lacked her husband's faith, and strove with poor success to pass the barrier, or see herself in her father's arms when life's day was done.

She drank the wine and brushed the crumbs from her baby's frock and face.

"He wrote Daniel a very beautiful letter—Mr. Woodrow, I mean. He don't think about death like my husband do; but the letter made even Dan think. 'Twas deep, lovely language," she said.

"He'll be meat for the grave himself if he ban't careful," answered Mrs. Weekes. "A poor, starved frame and hungry eyes, though there's a wonderful gentlemanly hang about his clothes. Something be burning him up in my opinion—we all mark it. Jarratt says 'tis his harmful ideas about religion; I say 'tis a decline. I told the man so to his face last week, when I went over to see Susan; and

he laughed in his gentle way, and said he was all right. Still, I don't like his look—more don't John Prout."

Sarah Jane listened, but she knew a good deal more about Hilary Woodrow than any other living creature save himself. Little by little there had risen an intimacy between them—not of the closest, yet of a sort beyond friendship. She met him by appointment, now here, now there. To this extent she lived a double life, since Brendon heard nothing of these occasions. Woodrow talked of going away for the winter, but she knew that he would never do so. The days when he did not see her were blank days to him. He often spoke warmly of Brendon and of the future that he designed for him. He longed to make her presents, but could not. Now thinking upon almost the last words that her father had spoken to her, Sarah Jane determined to throw herself upon Hilary's goodness and honour. But she reckoned without his passion.

That night, while Brendon slept beside her, she turned and turned sleepless, with a wet handkerchief rolled up in her hands. She mused upon the dear dust in the churchyard, and the living man beside her, and of that other who thought waking, and dreamed sleeping, of none but her. How did she regard him?

For a month after her father's death Hilary Woodrow spared her, and she appreciated his self-denial. But during the days he saw her not he revealed a constant and steady thought for her. He had continued speech with Daniel, and Sarah Jane noted that Brendon's enthusiasm for his master grew as Woodrow's trust in him increased. Then she saw Hilary again herself, and his flame leapt the fiercer for their weeks of separation.

CHAPTER XIII

BURSTING OF THE SPRINGS

A YEAR passed by and little happened to mark it. Then full store of incident fell upon the dwellers at Ruddyford Farm.

It is to be recorded to the credit of Jarratt Weekes that, in the bitter difference which now happened between him and Daniel Brendon, he was not altogether at fault. Nevertheless an underlying element of malignity mingled with his attitude. In giving of advice, subtle personal satisfaction often lurks; yet sometimes the emotion belongs merely to that implicit sense of superiority felt by the critic over the criticized. When Weekes met Brendon on an autumn day and plunged into the most dangerous subject that he could have chosen, he did so quite awake to the delicacy; but he did so from motives at any rate largely blent with good. He was now himself happily married, for Mary Churchward, despite a harsh voice and a hard nature, had plenty of sense, and proved practical and patient. Jarratt's feeling to Brendon and his wife was mainly friendly, and if some subacid of memory still tinged thought, that recollection had largely faded. To sum up, if his motives in this encounter were mingled, he meant no lasting evil, but rather lasting good from his action. That Daniel might smart a little he guessed, and the fact did not cause him any regret. Frankly, he was glad of it. The giving of this advice would lift him above the lesser man, and, by so doing, help him to win back a little self-esteem. As for the upshot of his counsel, he felt very certain that it must tend to benefit the other and establish him more securely in his home and its vital relations. Since he acted in profound ignorance of Brendon's own character, his conscience was clear, and his mind free to state the case with all the force and tact at his command.

He told himself that he was doing his duty; but his deed, none the less, had a relish that duty usually lacks.

Under any circumstances danger must attend the operation—how great Weekes did not guess; and in the event, the added circumstance of Daniel's mood had to be reckoned with. This precipitated the catastrophe with terrific suddenness.

When they met, Brendon's dark star was up. Matters were contrary at the farm, and a thing, little to be expected, had happened in the shape of a quarrel between Daniel and John Prout. Their master was the subject, and a word from the younger man brought sharp rebuke upon him.

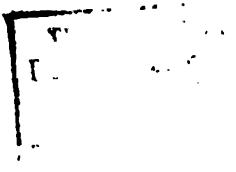
"'Tis all tom-foolery about his being ill," said Daniel. "He's as tough as any of us. 'Tis laziness that keeps him mooning about with his books down at Lydford—that's my opinion."

But Prout flashed out at this, and, for the first time, the other saw him in anger.

"Tom-fool yourself!" he said; "and never you open your mouth to chide your betters in my hearing again, for I won't stand it. You ought to know wiser. *You* to speak against him! If you had half his patience and half his brain power, you might presume to do it; but you haven't: you've got nought but the strength of ten men and a very unsettled temper to make it dangerous. I'm sorry for you—you that pose for a righteous man and mistrust them as be set over you. What do you know about the sufferings of the body? When do a cough rack you of nights and rheumatics gnaw your bones like a hungry dog? Don't you dare to say a disrespectful word of Mr. Woodrow again, for I'll have you away if you do! After the master he's been to you—lifting you above the rest and making you free of the farm to work where you will, as if 'twas your own. Dear, dear!—'tis a bad come-along-of-it, and I'm greatly disappointed in you, my son."

His anger waned towards the end of this speech, as his

RUDDYFORD. [*To face p.* 214.



words testified; but Brendon, having heard, hesitated and showed self-control. He was bitterly hurt at this tremendous reproof, yet he perceived that it was justified from Mr. Prout's standpoint. He did not seek to set himself right. His first anger died out when John reminded him of the things that the master had done for him. He apologized, but in a half-hearted manner; and then, with darkness of spirit, betook himself about his business.

It was necessary that morning that he should go into Bridgetstowe, and through a wet autumnal Moor he walked, passed under Doe Tor, and presently reached the little Lyd, where she foamed in freshet from the high lands.

The springs had burst, and the wilderness was traversed with a thousand glittering rillets. In the deep coombs and wherever a green dimple broke the stony slopes of the hills, water now leapt and glittered. Traced to their sources, the springs might be found beginning in little bubbling cauldrons, from which, through a mist of dancing sand, they rose out of the secret heart of the granite. Then, by winding ways, they fell, and the green grass marked their unfamiliar passing with beads of imprisoned light on every blade. It was the death-time of heath and furze, the springtime of moss, lichen and fungus. Quaint fleshy caps and hoods—some white and grey, some amber and orange-tawny—spattered the heath; and many mosses fell lustrously in sheets and shone in pads and cushions. The great lycopodium spread green fingers through the herbage, and his little lemon spires of fruit thrust upward in companies and groups. Beside him the eye-bright still blossomed; the whortle's foliage turned to scarlet; and in the marsh the bog mosses made splendid mosaic of delicate and tender colours. At river's brink the seed-cases of the asphodel burnt, like a scarlet flame; the sky-coloured bells of the least campanula still defied death; and the later gentian grew and lifted purple blossoms from the glimmering grass.

Daniel Brendon crossed Lyd by the stepping-stones and met with Jarratt Weekes. They walked along together, and

the elder man happened to speak of a matter then in the other's thoughts.

"I suppose you know Mr. Woodrow's going at last? My wife says she can't live with her father no more, and she's right; so I've had to say that I must have the cottage empty after Christmas. What's he going to do?"

"Can't tell you," answered the other. "There's a general opinion that he's not strong and didn't ought to spend his winters up here."

"I reckon we shouldn't have heard about his health if he'd been a poor man. He's well enough to do everything he wants to do. Have 'e marked that?"

Daniel nodded.

"All the same, we mustn't judge people by their looks," he said. "I was thinking much as you do only an hour agone—and saying it too. But I got a pretty sharp rap over the knuckles from Prout for my pains. Ban't our business, after all. He's a very good master—never heard of a better."

"And a very good payer. I've nothing to grumble at. Only a man's wife must be his first thought. Mrs. Weekes wants to go into the house."

"Us married ones can afford to laugh at the bachelors," declared Daniel.

"So us can—though the bachelors have been known to pay back the compliment sometimes, and make us a laughing-stock. When I was married, kind-hearted people whispered 'twas the rasp wedding with the nutmeg-grater. That's the sort of gentlemanly thing one's friends say behind one's back. But I think it has been proved different. My wife's a wonder in her way—got all my mother's sense without her tongue."

"You're lucky for certain. I'm glad Sarah Jane and her be such good friends."

"So am I, and—and friendship's nothing if it won't—— Look here, may I say a thing to you on a delicate subject, Brendon? Will you promise not to be angered if I do it?"

"If you speak of friendship, who can be angered?" asked Daniel. "What delicate subject should you have to speak to me about?"

"The tenderest a man can touch to a neighbour. But from pure goodwill I speak it. You'll judge that when you hear me. A man doesn't strain friendship and say ticklish things for fun. 'Tis only out of kind feeling for you and Sarah Jane that I'm going to say it."

"Better leave her out," said Daniel. "Her welfare's the same as mine. She've not got any good away from my good. If you do me a friendly turn, you'll be doing the same to she."

"I can't leave her out. She's the matter."

Brendon stopped and stared.

"What be you talking about?"

"About Sarah Jane. There it is. I told you 'twas a delicate matter. If you won't stand it, I'll leave it alone."

"Go on," said Brendon shortly. His voice had changed, and Weekes noticed it.

"Don't be angry for nought. It's a free country, and I've a right to my opinions, I suppose. I say again, 'twas a great act of friendship in me to touch this thing at all; but if you're going to take it in an evil spirit, I'll stop. 'Tis no better than the old saying of Lydford Law—when they hanged a man first and tried him afterwards—for you to speak in that tone of voice, and command me to go on, as if I was a servant and you the master."

"What do you want, then?"

"I want you to understand that I'm not doing this because I like it. I know the gravity of what I'm going to say; but I'm not a word-of-mouth friend, but a real one—where a man will let me be. So I say to you that unwise things are being done—not by Sarah Jane—not for a moment—but by Hilary Woodrow."

"I must ask you to name them."

Weekes did not answer immediately. Then he went to the heart of the matter, so far as he knew it.

"They walk together. They meet—accident on her part, no doubt; but not on his. Yet could he meet her if he hadn't fixed to do it? 'Tisn't wrong, of course; but 'tisn't wise."

"You've been watching Sarah Jane?"

"Not I. What is it to me? They've been seen together in lonely places, that's all—no harm, of course—still——"

The other blazed out and his voice rose.

"You're a dirty-minded man to say these things to me, and 'tis far off from friendship that makes you say them! Quick to think evil—and wish evil. To cloud the fair name of a man's wife—because she's a fool——"

"Don't be a fool yourself! I'm clouding nobody and nothing. I'm only telling you that——"

"Tell me no more!" roared Daniel.

"If I did, perhaps you wouldn't make such a silly row," answered Jarratt, hot in his turn. "Why, you great stupid lout, what is it to me if she's his mistress? I don't care a damn—I——"

Brendon cut him short, made a loud, inarticulate sound like an animal, and struck the smaller man to the earth. He hit Weekes with his right fist full upon the forehead; and the blow dropped the castle-keeper backwards, and deprived him of consciousness.

Daniel shouted at the prone figure, raved at him and cursed him. Any chance beholder had fled with fear, under the impression that a maniac rioted there. The passion-storm was terrific, and for a time Brendon seemed not responsible. Then his wrath gradually passed, and both the conscious and unconscious men came to their senses. Weekes recovered, sat up, then stood up unsteadily, and looked round for his hat and stick. Daniel immediately left him and went upon his way.

That night Brendon told his wife what he had done, and she listened while he spoke at length. He cast no blame upon her; but very sternly he bade her be more mindful of

herself henceforth; and he warned her with terrible earnestness that he would hold it no sin to destroy any man who injured him in his most sacred possession. His great self-control on this occasion impressed her more than rage would have done, and she uttered no protest when he told her of a fixed intention to leave Ruddyford.

"You're right to go," she declared.

"John Prout threatened to have me turned off for speaking rudely of the master this morning," he said. "Well, I'll go without being turned off. I can stop no more after this, and I won't. Don't think I'm angered with you or with him. I'm not. I scorn to be. 'Tis only that knave that has angered me by his evil lie. This won't end here. He'll have the law of me for what I've done and disgrace me, be sure of that. I must suffer what I must suffer: my conscience is perfectly at peace about that. He got less than he deserved."

But time passed, and Jarratt Weekes made no sign. So far as Brendon could judge, none even heard of the encounter. At any rate, it did not reach his ear again. It was said that the horse of Mr. Weekes had lifted its head suddenly, and given him a pair of black eyes while he was stooping over its neck.

CHAPTER XIV

A LUNAR RAINBOW

THE folk often called at the cottage of Philip Weekes, for, despite her loquacity, Hephzibah was known for a woman of judgment, and her friends, with practice, had learned to pick the grains of sense from that chaff of words in which it whirled.

On an evening some time after the reported accident to her son, Mrs. Weekes sat in the midst of a little company, for several men had dropped in on various errands.

Her kitchen reeked with tobacco-smoke. Philip and Mr. Huggins were side by side on a settle by the fire; Mr. Churchward occupied a chair near the table, and Mrs. Weekes herself sat beside it darning stockings. A bottle of sloe gin stood on a tray near her.

The schoolmaster thought more highly of Hephzibah than did she of him; but since Jarratt had chosen his daughter, she was always civil.

The talk ran on Adam's son.

"He has succeeded in getting a pictorial effort hung at a public exhibition in Plymouth," said Mr. Churchward. "They are holding a picture show there—all West Country artists; and I confess I am gratified to hear that William has been chosen. I think of taking Mary down to see it presently. Perhaps, if we selected the market-day, you would join us, Mrs. Weekes?"

"Likely!" she answered. "Me trapsing about looking at pictures, and my stall——there, you men! Guy Fawkes and good angels! And you go about saying you've got all the sense! I could wish your son might find something better to do, I'm sure, for there's no money to it, and never will be."

"The art of photography will be a serious stroke to the

painters of pictures, no doubt," admitted Mr. Churchward. "Yet such things have not the colours of nature which the artist's brush produces—nor have they the life."

"As to life," she answered, "there's a proper painted picture down to Plymouth in a shop near the market—the best picture as ever I see in all my days. Two mice gnawing a bit of Stilton cheese. Life! Why, *'tis* life. You can pretty near smell the cheese. And only two pound ten, for the ticket's on it. If you want life, there you are; but it have been in that window a year to my certain knowledge. Nobody wants it, and nobody wants your son's daubs. He'd much better give over and burn all his trash.'

"He can't, my dear woman. 'Tis in his blood—he must be painting, like I must be teaching and you must be selling. We're built on a pattern, Mrs. Weekes, and that pattern we must work out against all odds. William is a *lusus naturæ* as one may say—a freak of nature."

"I'm sorry for you," answered she. "There's nought to be proud of, anyhow. Where's the cleverness in fashioning things that ban't worth more in open market than the dirt pies the childer make in the road? Better paint houses, and get paid, than paint pictures and get nought."

"'Tis a most curious thing that such a huge man as the 'Infant' do always paint such-little pickshers,' said Mr. Huggins. "Why—them things what Noah Pearn have got hanging up in the bar parlour ban't bigger than a sheet of writing paper. Yet, from the tremendous size of the man, you'd have thought he'd have taken a public-house signboard at the very least."

"Size in matters of pictorial art is nothing, Valentine," explained the schoolmaster. "Some of the biggest books and pictures have been written and painted by the smallest men of their inches you could imagine."

"All the same, give me they whacking pickshers you see hanging outside a circus," said Mr. Huggins. "In my time I've marked pickshers to the full so large as a rick-cloth, all a-flaming with tigers and spotted leopards and

wild men, till you might think you was walking straight into them savage, foreign places where such things come from. If William could paint like that, I doubt he'd make a fortune."

"He would scorn to do it, Val. However, you are quite right when you say they would produce more money, for such is life. People don't want——"

Philip Weekes rose.

"There's somebody knocking at the door," he said.

"Susan, I expect," answered his wife. "My stars, the airs and graces of these giglet girls nowadays! What d'you think? She's started an evening out! And Mr. Woodrow—more shame to him—never raised any objection; and now, of a Thursday, she puts on her little silly frills and feathers, and goes off on her own account, Lord knows where, like a grown-up person! But I told him, as her aunt, that she had to be in by half after nine. And that she does do—else I'll have her back here again."

It was not Susan, but John Prout, who now entered.

"Just dropped in for a tell and a pipe afore I go homeward," he explained. "Been seeing master, and it have cast me down."

"He's a deal better, in my opinion," said Philip. "Livelier like, and I should say he'd put on flesh. Anyway he's going to leave Lydford come spring, for Jarratt means to be in his house afore Lady Day."

Mr. Prout nodded and filled his pipe. At the same moment Jarratt Weekes himself entered.

"Hullo!" he said. "Have 'e got a party?"

"'Tis your mother's ripe wisdom, Jar, as draws us men," answered Mr. Huggins.

"An' her ripe sloe gin, I reckon. Has anybody seed Mrs. Brendon? My wife tells me that she's in Lydford to-night."

"I seed her at tea-time," answered Philip. "She was going up to visit Billy Long's wife—her that broke her leg in the gorge last August."

"Then I'll go that way myself," declared the younger Weekes. "I want a word with her."

"Tell her to call here, then, please; 'tis a rough night. Us'll go home-along together," said John Prout.

"She don't want you," answered Hephzibah.

"I know that; but I want her. She's as strong as a man, and I ban't now, worse luck. Sarah Jane will give me an arm up over White Hill, where the wind will be blowing a hurricane to-night. I had to go down in a hurry to Little Lydford on foot, and I'm cruel weary."

Mrs. Weekes poured out a large wine-glass of cordial for him.

"How's Mr. Woodrow?" she asked.

"Just been there. There's things troubling him. Even to me he was a thought short—distracted like. Wouldn't talk business, and sent me off almost afore I'd sat down. There's something on his mind without a doubt."

"His health?"

"Not that. I judge he's better if anything. But he's terrible lonely."

"Vicar's son often goes in to have a talk, I believe," said Philip.

"Vicar would stop it if he knowed, however. Mr. Woodrow's opinions are very queer, so 'tis rumoured," declared Mr. Huggins.

Prout sighed, drank his sloe gin, with many thanks to the giver. Then he rose painfully.

"I won't stop, for if I get stiff 'twill be a grief to my bones going home. If you don't mind, Jarratt, I'll go along with you."

"What I want to say to Sarah Jane's a matter of a little business touching her better half," the castle-keeper explained.

"So you shall, then. I'll walk out of earshot. But the night gets worse, and we'd better be on our way, if I'm to make as far as Ruddyford at all. I ought to have ridden, but I'd been on my pony all morning, and he was tired too."

They departed into rough weather. The moon was rising through a scud of light thin cloud, and fine rain, swept by the wind, drove out of the west.

"What will Hilary Woodrow do when he leaves my place?" asked Weekes.

"Don't know no more than you," answered the other.

They went to the house of Billy Long, and found that Sarah Jane had left it an hour before.

"She's half-way home now, no doubt," said Prout. "Well, I'll be going, Jarratt. I'll tell her you want to see her."

"And tell her unbeknownst to her husband, please. There's no harm brewed, I need not tell you that; but he's a peppery chap and his temper sometimes obscures his wits."

"It does. He talks of going away now."

"Going away! I hadn't heard that."

Mr. Prout proceeded. Then an idea struck Jarratt.

"You'm weary—see here; if we cross my orchard, behind the cottage, you'll save more than a quarter of a mile. 'Tis trespassing, so long as Woodrow rents the place, but he'll pardon the owner; anyway, he'll pardon you."

"Anything to save a few yards. I'd ask master for a shakedown here, but they'd be frighted out of their wits at Ruddyford if I didn't come back."

"Shall I see if I can get somebody to drive you out?"

"No, no; I can do it, if I go slow and steady. Us'll walk through the orchard certainly."

"Don't speak near the back-side of the house, then, else he'll hear you, and think 'tis people stealing the apples."

They went silently through the orchard, but the wind concealed lesser sounds and panted loudly overhead. Then they passed under a lighted window that faced upon their way. The blind was drawn down, but a bright beam shot along one side. On the impulse of the moment Weekes peeped in.

"Reading one of his eternal books, I'll wager," he whispered.

Then every muscle tightened. He glared and grinned out of the darkness into the light, and fell back with a great gasp. His mind worked quickly. Prout had plodded on, and Weekes now hastened after him.

"Come back, come back," he said. "'Tis worth a few steps. 'Twill do your heart good—quick!"

The other found himself dragged to the window before he knew what Jarratt meant. His face was thrust to the aperture at the blind edge. He could not choose but see. The whole incident occupied but a second, and John Prout fell back and nearly dropped upon the grass. His stick left his fingers: both his hands went up over his face.

"Ban't true—ban't true!" he groaned.

Jarratt Weekes picked up his stick and hastened the old man away.

"True as hell-fire," he said. "And never fool yourself to think you haven't seen it; for you have."

He laughed.

"Thank the Lord I waited," he went on. "This was worth waiting for! This be worth chewing over too! I shan't be in no hurry now! I'll bide a thought longer still. Keep up, my old chap! Your master's got a bit of life in him after all—eh?"

The other pushed off the arm that had supported him.

"Go—go, for God's sake," he cried. "And if you're a man, forget——"

"The beauty of it is, that if he'd not quarrelled with me, I should never have found this out," said Weekes gleefully. "You know so much, John, that I'll tell you a bit more now. 'Twasn't my horse, but Daniel Brendon's leg-o-mutton fist, that blacked my eyes and turned my face yellow and blue a bit ago. He felled me with a blow that might have killed me, because I warned him that his wife saw too much of yonder man. And if he'd not done it, I should not have wanted words with the woman, and never been here to-night. So he's brewed his own drink. D'you mark how God works in the world, Prout?"

He laughed again, and, waiting for no answer, vanished upon his way.

The old man remained trembling and irresolute. Then he turned again and went back and stood opposite Hilary Woodrow's dwelling under the rain. For twenty minutes he waited; then the church clock struck half-past nine, and Susan, with a youth holding an umbrella over her head, arrived. Her friend put down the umbrella, kissed Susan twice, then shook hand with her, and then departed. She entered the house, and a moment later Sarah Jane left it by a back entrance, and slipped into the road.

"Be that Mrs. Brendon?" Prout called out.

She stopped, and he approached her.

"Why, John, whatever are you doing down here? Lucky we met. I can give you an arm up-over. 'Tis a fierce night, seemingly."

Through the wild weather they passed, presently breasted White Hill, and bent to the tremendous stroke of the wind. Fierce thin rain drove across the semi-darkness, and where a rack of cloud was torn wildly into tatters, the hunter's moon seemed to plough and plunge upon her way, through the stormy seas of the sky. The wind whistled, but the heath was wet, and the dead heather did not utter the musical, tinkling note that the east wind's besom rings from it.

Mr. Prout was very silent.

"Be I travelling too fast for you?" she asked him.

"No, no," he answered.

"I'll ax you not to tell Dan that I went to see the master to-night," she said.

He did not reply.

"Dan don't understand him like you and me do," she continued.

"For God's sake don't talk," he begged. "There's a cruel lot on my mind."

"And on mine, for that matter. I'm a wicked, joyful woman, John Prout!"

For some time silence fell between them as they were thrust before the wind.

"Oh, my God, what a terrible, beautiful world it is!" she cried suddenly. "But cruel difficult sometimes."

He could not speak to her.

"D'you know what's going to happen?" she asked. "I mustn't tell Daniel, but I must tell somebody or 'twill kill me. Mr. Woodrow—he thinks the wide world of dear Daniel. He puts him first—first afore all in his mind."

Mr. Prout groaned, and she extended her hand to him.

"I do wish you'd take my arm, John. This be too heavy work for your weak legs."

He took it. He longed to speak and pray her for her own sake, and for his master's sake, to keep Brendon to his resolution. His master was the uppermost thought.

"Mr. Woodrow's going to write a will," said Sarah Jane. "I prayed him not; I prayed him not to think of death, or any such thing. His be a very beautiful, generous life, John."

"Oh, woman, why was you let come into it?"

"I love him, John."

"Don't—don't, for Christ's sake, tell these things. I can't bear 'em."

"I love him—because he loves me, but more because he loves Dan so much. He mustn't die—he——"

"Leave it—shut your mouth, or I won't say what I'll answer. God's over all—let me cling to that. I'd cut my heart out for him—but—there, never you speak to me about him again—never—never. I wish I had died afore to-night."

"Don't take on. I'll pay if—— You won't tell Dan I was with him. 'Twould spoil all—Dan being what he is. And you won't say a word of this great news. He's to speak to Daniel himself. What joy for Daniel! How he'll bless his God—eh, John?"

Prout dragged himself helplessly and silently beside her.

Then a wonderful spectacle appeared above them in the firmament.

From the depth of the northern heavens there sprang an immense halo of colourless light, where the moon shone upon unnumbered particles of flying rain. Wan, yet luminous, flung with one perfect sweep upon the storm, it endured—the only peaceful thing in that wild world of tumultuous cloud and clamouring wind. The arch of the lunar rainbow threw its solemn and radiant span across the whole earth from west to east. It framed all Dartmoor, and one shining foot seemed to sink upon the Severn Sea, while the other marked the places of the dawn.

They stood and stared a moment; then both were nearly blown off their legs and driven forward by the sudden buffet of the gale.

"Heaven be over all, like that beautiful silvery bow above our heads," she cried loud in his ear.

"There's no rainbow for me," he answered. "And there didn't ought to be for you, woman."

"How do I know? I only know my heart be merry when I think on Daniel. Who can do wrong that brings joyfulness to good people?"

He groaned again and she misunderstood.

"Don't take on so and be sad for master. There's happiness even for him in the world still—here and there; and happiness is God's gift, I suppose. None else can give it to a man—so my Dan says. Them as bring it be the messengers—only the messengers. All the same, I hate only Heaven to be thanked when a man or woman does a brave, lovely thing."

"Won't you never be like other females?" he asked. "Seeing what your husband is, God help the reckoning."

"Leave it so," she answered, "and say nought to nobody. You know nothing more than that I love the man—so do you—for pity—and for his gentle thoughts—and for his loneliness—aye, and for his own self too. I'll say that to you. He's a good man. He does countless good

things; you know that. Don't torment yourself for him—or me. Forget you met me to-night. Here's the stepping-stones, an' the moon hidden, just when we wanted the light most. Take hold of my hand. I'm stronger far than you."

They crossed the water carefully, and the great shape of Daniel Brendon loomed up ahead.

"At last!" he shouted. "I beginned to think you was night-foundered in the storm. Did you see that wonder in the sky a bit ago?"

Once more Sarah Jane spoke swiftly to Prout before they reached the other.

"Mind this too," she said. "There's the joy of giving, John. 'Tis a dear joy to give! Hilary Woodrow knows that—so do I—none better than him and me."

The old man drew a grief-stricken breath, and left her with her husband.

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

BRENDON STOPS AT RUDDYFORD

Even Joe Tapson expressed regret when Daniel Brendon decided to leave Ruddyford, and let his decision become known. All begged him to reconsider the step; all bluntly asked where he expected to find more satisfactory employment, a happier home, and equal money. Prout had been among those who urged him most strenuously to reconsider his determination. Then shone the lunar rainbow, and from that hour the head man was silent.

Three days later Daniel, after long brooding, set off to do two things. He meant to visit Jarratt Weekes and express contrition for his recent violence; and he intended to call upon his master, that he might give notice of his approaching departure from Ruddyford.

Joe met him on the way, saw that Daniel wore Sunday clothes, guessed his mission, and made a final appeal.

"Don't you be a fool, Dan. A man's only worth what he'll fetch, as you ought to know. I withstood you so long as I could do it, and, to this day, I don't reckon you be worth a penny more in open market than what I be myself; because, though I've but one eye, it sees further than the two of many men I could name; and though you've got larger muscles upon you than me, yet I won't grant your brains be ahead of mine by an inch. However, he thought different, and he's the purse, so 'tis for us to

mind our own business and keep our opinions in check. I've long larned to do that."

"You mistake me, Joe," answered the other. "My money's all right, and the place is all right, and I shall be mighty sorry to go from you all—you as much as any man, for in your way you've taught me a great deal worth knowing. But life have got an inside and an outside to it; an' 'tis the inside of mine I ban't too pleased with. More than good wages and good friends go to peace of mind. '

"Well, I hope he'll make you change your ideas, for I'm sure he'll try."

"The more he tries, the steadfaster shall I stand."

"More fool you, then. However, go your way. I know a chap who'd be very wishful to fill your shoes, an' a very willing boy, though 'twill be like David coming to do Goliath's work."

Brendon called at Adam Churchward's and learned from Jarratt's wife that he was at Lydford Castle.

"'Tis his last season there," she said; "for he've grown too big a man for that small work now, and his time's better worth. I wanted to make him give it up long ago, but he don't like dropping sure money, even though 'tis small money. However, they've appointed young Teddy Westover to succeed him—old Westover's grandson."

"I'm much obliged to you," answered Daniel. "I'll seek him there."

Presently, as a party left the ruin, Brendon met Weekes, and asked to be allowed to speak to him.

Jarratt hid his heart and consented to listen. He nodded gravely while Brendon apologized, explained that he had acted from worthy motives, and added that he had told nobody—not even his wife—of the outrage put upon him by Daniel.

"I'm sorry to God," said Brendon. "I was wrong every way to smite you. Whether you was right to speak

what you did, I won't say. I don't know. I only know that I'd no right to answer so. And I ask you to forgive an erring man. I was shaken from my hold on the Lord —surprised away from it by the shock of what you said. You were wrong in your opinion—that I do steadfastly know; but none the less—— But I ban't here to make any excuses. I'm sorry to the heart, and I beg you to forgive me."

"I will do so, Daniel Brendon."

"Thank you. There's another thing. I've got a five-pound note here. I heard as you kept your bed for two days. That means I did more than hurt you. I robbed you of money. Please to take this. 'Tis a sign that you forgive me properly if you take it."

He held out the note and Weekes extended his hand quickly, then drew it back.

"I was off work three days, to be exact. But five pounds for three days would be ten for a week. That's five hundred and twenty for the year."

"Ban't it enough?"

Weekes laughed.

"That's a home question; however, since you want to do the honest thing, I won't stand in your way."

He took out a heavy leather purse and put the note into it.

"Now we'll cry quits. Don't let this go no further."

Weekes shook hands and left Daniel abruptly; but the big man felt satisfied. He held that, save for his own lasting regret, the matter was now concluded. He continued to be ashamed of himself when he reflected upon it; but he ceased to feel any pity for Jarratt Weekes, and he could not satisfy himself that the other's motives had been pure.

Now Daniel called upon his master and found him at home.

"I came because of the rain," he said. "I knew 'twould hold you to the house."

Hilary was writing, and held his hand for silence. Then he finished a page and blotted it. Various papers littered his desk, and, among others, lay a large one, rolled up and tied round the middle with pink tape.

"Good-morning, Dan. This is a funny coincidence. I sent for you an hour ago. You missed my messenger."

"I met no messenger."

Woodrow rose and took his pipe from the mantelshelf.

"Let's have your business first, then you shall know mine. Sit down. We don't see one another often enough. I wish you'd come more frequently."

Brendon took a chair and put his soft black hat under it.

"'Tis harder to speak afore those kind words, master. And yet—I've got to do it. I want to go—I must go. This is to give notice, please. I'll suit your convenience, of course. Perhaps after Christmas. I'm mighty sorry for many reasons. Still, 'twill be the best thing."

An expression of real pain crossed the face of Hilary Woodrow.

"How can you say this, Daniel? Don't you care more than that for me? I thought—why, good God—I hold you dearer than almost anybody in the world! You're far, far more to me than a servant. You—a friend—to say this! You, my right hand, to ask to be cut off!"

"I know you set store by me. I know how good you've been—yet—we can't say all we know. You mustn't think 'tis a small thing; you mustn't think I'm not grateful, master. I owe you far more than 'tis in my power to pay. I pray for you. 'Tis all I can do—all the poor can do for the rich—to pray for 'em. My work's nought. That's the everyday business between man and man. For that you pay, and pay well. But prayer's beyond. I tell you this because, afore I go, I want you to know I'm more than just a strong man working for wages."

"You shall not go! This is a matter far beyond the farm, or the welfare of the farm. You are a great deal to me. You are an example to me and to all of us. While

you have prayed for me, I—I haven't prayed, since I know of nothing to pray to that has ears to hear—but I've done what I could—according to my lights."

"I know that. You've been good and generous to me. There's nothing—nothing I can say against you."

"I can't part with you, Dan. I won't believe the reason is beyond explanation. Be honest with me—absolutely. Tell me why this idea has come to you. You're at a point far more vital in your career than you think for. Don't leave any shadow or uncertainty. Be dead straight about it, Dan."

Brendon did not answer, but he struggled fiercely with himself. He was a great-hearted man, and now, within sound of his master's voice, in sight of his earnest eyes, his reason dwindled somewhat.

Suddenly he blurted out the truth.

"Jarratt Weekes told me a while ago that you saw too much of Sarah Jane. I believe that he said it without malice. He thought so—like as not others do."

A great expiration left the lungs of Woodrow.

"Too much of her! No, Dan—not too much of her—not enough; but too much of this dirty little village and the mean-minded vermin that live in it! Nobody could see too much of Sarah Jane—any more than they could see too much of the sun in the sky, or hear too much of the song of the birds. I don't see enough of her—or of you. How glad I am you had the pluck to speak!"

"One thing I must ask of you—to take no step against Weekes. I've punished him. I nearly broke his neck when he said it. I knew 'twas a lie; but, of course, I can't live where 'tis possible to tell such lies."

"You'll never get beyond the reach of falsehood in this world, Dan. Lying is woven into the fabric of all human life—part of the regular pattern. We should be like the beasts that perish if we did not lie. Civilized existence rests on a bedrock of lying. 'Tis the cement that keeps every state together; the first necessity of conscious exist-

ence. Only Nature can work without falsehood. The lie is as old as human language. If men said what they thought, the world's work would stand still. Try it—yet I wouldn't ask you to do that. Why should I wish my best friend to have nought but enemies?"

"I won't live where 'tis possible to tell this lie," repeated Brendon.

"If you believed the lie—then I should be the first to ask you to be gone. Happily you don't. I've not got much heart, Brendon; but the little I have would break if I thought you did not care for me. If there is a thing that I've hoped and planned and rejoiced to plan in this fading life of mine, it is your future."

"My future! That's God's work to plan—not yours."

"I know it is. But in one of these conversations I held with your wife, which have shocked this low-minded rascal, she said a fine thing to me, Dan. She said, 'All good things come from my man's God. You can't have no good without His hand be in it. And men and women are His messengers to carry the goodness of God up and down in the world and show it.'"

"That's true enough. Nothing new, surely?"

"It was new to me. If there's a God, Daniel, He is a good God. I'll grant you so much. And if good comes to any man, 'tis his God that sends it. I suppose you believe that?"

"Where else can good come from? Man's heart don't imagine it. Man's heart don't breed it."

"Then you're answered, for into my heart has long since come the wish to do you good. I desire it, and I am thankful that I can perform it. I wish you to have power, because you understand how to use power wisely; and content, because you are the only man I ever met who understood that content is higher than happiness."

"You've done all you could, and I have thanked you."

"And thanked your God, I warrant?"

"Yes—Him first."

"It's good to thank Him, I suppose?"

"It's right—it's natural—'tis all we can give Him—our thanks and worship."

"Then take my hand, Daniel, and say I've cleared this cloud. Don't make my sad life sadder by going out of it. Don't say I may not sometimes see and speak with Mrs. Brendon. If you had a beautiful and rare flower in your garden, you would not deny other people the sight of it. 'Tis a parallel case every way. She is a remarkable woman, full of high qualities. I ask vou to be my close friend henceforth, Brendon. It would seem a strange thing for a master to ask of his man. Yet I do it. Prout is my friend and I want you too, because you are much more to me than good old John, or any other man on earth."

He stopped and coughed, then rose, took a wisp of paper from a china jar, and re-lighted his pipe.

Brendon did not speak. Woodrow's words troubled him at one moment, gratified him at the next; now the farmer said a thing that made him start, and, before he had grasped it, the quick, nervous voice passed on and uttered some word that could not fail to soften his heart.

"Say you'll stop, Dan," continued Hilary Woodrow. "Say you'll stop, before I come to my affair. 'Twill spoil all if you cleave to this determination. 'Twill make the thing I have plotted all dust and ashes. Yet I won't influence you with it. I won't influence you save to say this: I'm not going to be in the land of the living more than a few years at best; but you'll cloud those years for me, Daniel, if you go; and as sure as your God's watching you to-day, you'll be sorry afterwards, if you stick to this determination."

He turned to the window, and smoked and looked out into the little street.

For a minute or two neither spoke. Then Brendon bent for his hat, picked it up, and rose.

"Since you put it that way, and say so solemnly that

'tis in my power to better your life by stopping, then I'll stop, master. Don't think I wanted to go, but for what I told you. 'Twas the only thing in the world that would have took me. But since 'tis false, I'll spurn it. My God's Self's a jealous God, but—there 'tis—I'll fight to be large-minded—I'll stop——"

Woodrow did not speak, but his eyes were damp when he turned from the window and came back to the table. A strange conflict of emotions filled his spirit, choked his throat, seethed upward to his brain, and sunk downward to his heart. His admiration and even affection for Daniel were genuine enough at that moment; and he rejoiced at the thing that he was about to do. But not for an instant did he mourn the thing that he had done.

He could not speak immediately.

He took the other's hand and shook it very warmly. Then he picked up the packet on the table, dragged the tape off, and gave it to Brendon.

"Read," he said.

The giant, amazed at such emotion, stared dumbly out of his dark, dog-like eyes, opened the packet and knit his brows to peruse the calligraphy.

Woodrow walked about the room while Daniel read his will. It was short, and took but three minutes. Then Brendon put the paper on the table again.

"Tell me one thing," he said. "Be you sure that to do this is not to wrong some other—somebody of your own kin who have a right to it all? Can you swear that?"

"None has a right. I'm alone in the world. My kin are remote and nothing to me. They are well-to-do, and have no anxiety. You must keep John Prout easy and comfortable until he dies, and also his sister—that's the only condition."

"I can't bring it home to my mind. 'Tis too much to happen to a man. I don't know what to say."

"Say you're my friend, that's all I want you to say."

"'Your friend'! This is not friendship. This is a

thing greater than friendship. I know how to thank my God; I don't know what to say to you, master."

"Not master. Thank me by calling me 'master' no more. Thank me by seeing me oftener—both of you. Talk to me. Tell me all you believe, and why you believe it. Help me, if you can. Perhaps your God will look to it that you pay me so well that my gift shall be dross to your gold. Stranger things have happened. I'd dearly like to believe in a world beyond this, Daniel, before I go to find out for myself. Now be off for a while. Good-bye—friend Daniel."

"Good-bye. I be dumb still—in a maze. I'm surely dreaming this."

"Tell nobody—not a soul except your wife. But ask her not to mention it."

Brendon went away entranced, and was nearly run over at the corner of the street by a waggon laden with straw. The carter laughed at him.

"Ban't often us catches you mooning about in the middle of the road!" he said.

Daniel climbed White Hill presently and looked down at Ruddyford. Then his eyes atoned for his lack of imagination, and helped him to understand and realize the prodigious thing that had happened.

This place would be his own. He would be master presently, and his child would follow him. It rushed upon him in a wave—drowned him almost, so that he panted for air. His mind turned to Woodrow, and, with heart and soul, he hoped that the farmer might enjoy length of days. He determined with himself that evermore he would add to his prayer for Woodrow that it might please God to let him see Truth before he died. He thought of himself being allowed to make Woodrow a Christian.

For a while he gazed, then considered Sarah Jane's joy. Suddenly his mind turned back to Hilary, and next he turned his body back also. He began to understand at last; he yearned to go before the giver again and say a

little of what he felt. As for God, Dan believed that he was in His presence all the time. An under-current of thanksgiving rose from his soul, like smoke of incense.

Words from his favourite, Isaiah, ran through his head as he swept with great strides back to Lydford:

"'That He may do His work, His strange work; and bring to pass His act, His strange act,'" the man kept repeating.

But the strange act went far deeper than Daniel conceived. Of the strange act, strange thoughts were bred in one man's spirit; and when he was alone, Woodrow pondered long of the amazing complexity of his own motives during the past few days, and of the impress stamped upon present thought and future resolution by this actual conversation with the husband of Sarah Jane. He was moved to find how little he had pretended, how much he had felt; how largely grain of truth mingled with the seed of falsehood sown by him upon Brendon's heart in that hour.

CHAPTER II

AFTER CHAPEL

THE chapel of the Luke Gospellers was full, and their pastor won his usual attention. With very considerable ability, through a ministry of some ten years, he had lifted his congregation along with himself to wider thinking. A tolerance rare amid the sects of Christianity belonged to him,

and he had imparted something of it to those who suffered him to lead them.

"How great is man, and how small," said the preacher, as he drew to the close of his address. "How much he has grasped at; how little he can hold. He measures the journeys of the stars and the paths of comets, marked for them through utmost space by the God that made them; but he cannot measure the limit of the growing grass-blade or the breadth of the petal of a budding flower. He predicts when the earth's shadow will fall upon the moon; but he cannot foretell when the next raindrop will fall upon the earth. His intellect has reached out into the universe and read rightly among the laws of it; but the way of the wind and the birth of the cloud, the advent of the frost and the appointed day of the storm—these are hidden from him. So also with his conscious nature and his power to do and to withstand; he is sublime and pitiful at a breath; and his greatness and littleness interwoven, appear on every public page of his history and in every private tablet of his heart."

He exhorted them to know themselves, to read their souls by the light of the Word of God; he told them that within the spectrum of that light were rays that could reach to the darkest, secretest chambers of the human spirit, and search and purify and sweeten them.

They listened, were uplifted according to the measure of their understanding, and went home in the brightness of the teacher's earnest words. Then life and the fret of it came between; and some of the seed perished immediately, and some was scorched at the springing.

Agg and Joe Tapson walked together on their way back to Ruddyford, and behind them came Sarah Jane, Daniel, and their little boy.

Tapson had already dismissed the service, and was grumbling to Walter Agg. They did not know the truth concerning Brendon and the future of the farm; but of late, in certain directions, Daniel was still further ad-

vanced, and even Agg felt it hard, because he did not understand.

"He's bewitched Woodrow, if you ax me," said Joe. "'Tis the evil eye over again. Farmer can't call his soul his own now. He don't seem to care a groat for the place. Thicky big monster be always right. Why, if he wanted to pull down the house and build it again to a new pattern, I believe it would be done. Prout's no more good than a bird on a tree; though he used to hold his own very well. Now he always says 'ditto' to Brendon."

"Not that Brendon be what he exactly was, all the same," argued Agg. "He's much gentler and easier, despite his uplifting. He don't order anybody about, and he's always got a good word for a good job well done."

"I know that and I grant it. But who be he to pat us on the back so masterful? I don't want his praise any more than his blame. Damn it all! I was getting my shilling a day afore the man was born!"

"'Tis just pushfulness have raised him up."

"Why don't I go and pat him on the back and say, 'Well done, Brendon!'? I've as much right to patronize him as what he have me," continued Joe.

The other laughed.

"Well, why don't you? 'Tis beyond words to explain these things. But there 'tis. He's above us—got there somehow—how, I don't know—had to do it by vartue of what's in him."

"He may come down again, however."

"I hope not. He's a good man, and grows larger-hearted and gentler as he grows older. His child have done a great deal to his character, as I dare say you've marked."

"We've a right to be jealous of him, all the same. There's no justice in it. If I came along with great ideas, who'd listen to me?" asked Mr. Tapson.

"That's it," answered Walter Agg very placidly. "That's just it. You and me don't get great ideas. Us

never think of anything worth a lump of peat. All the same, Joe, I'll tell you this: me and Peter Lethbridge was feeling much like you do a bit back. And I had a tell with Prout on the subject, and he said a thing worth remembering in my judgment. He said, 'Don't envy the man, souls; never envy nobody. 'Tis only God in heaven knows if a human creature's to be envied or not. No fellow-man can tell. How should they, for which among us can say from hour to hour whether even our own lot be good or evil?' That's what he spoke to me, and there's sense in it. King or tinker may come a cropper, but the tinker's up soonest. Not much could happen to me or you—especially you, with your wife dead and no children. Your ill fortune's behind you; and, when all's said, us ought not to make another man's good luck our bad luck. 'Tis a mean-minded thing, though common."

Elsewhere Daniel imparted a great ambition to Sarah Jane.

"I do wish that he could hear Matherson."

When either spoke indefinitely now, the other knew that Hilary Woodrow was meant.

"I believe he'd come if you made a favour of it," she answered.

"I'd ask minister to do something out of the common. Not that he don't put every ounce of his power into his preaching every week. But if I said 'Here's a soul coming to listen to you as be wandering—lost,' minister might be lifted to something special."

"He'd come for you."

"For you more likely. 'Twould be worth the effort before he goes away, for 'tis pretty certain now he won't stop here through winter. He's going to London again, just for the day, to hear what the doctor says. He's better, I believe myself. There's been a lot more heart and life in him of late, to my mind."

"You're going in to-night to have a pipe along with him, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am.'

"Then ask him—as a favour to you—to come to a service. Can't hurt him—so large-minded as he is—blames nobody."

"I'll ask him—and yet, I won't. He knows there'd be such a lot of meaning in it if I asked him. He'd think 'twas a deep-laid plot against his opinions. You ask him next time you see him. Say that you'd like him to hear Mr. Matherson. Let the thing come as a surprise, not a planned attack. If I say anything, he'll know he's to be preached at, and that would anger him. But you're lighter-handed. You ban't so deadly in earnest as I am."

"I'll say 'tis to please me, then, not you."

"Do so. It should be true too. You ought to be pleased to get him to come."

Brendon now went disarmed. Even his natural instincts were lulled. Sarah Jane did sometimes see the master, and often brought messages from him to her husband or to Prout. Daniel also, at Hilary's express desire, came twice weekly to smoke with him after the day's work was over. Brendon was a man capable of great gratitude. His fortune had worked largely upon that superficial crust of his character revealed to fellow-men; and, more than this: the sun of his great worldly success had warmed his heart to the core, sweetened his inner nature, made him happier, smothered something of the canine jealousy that belonged to him as an ingredient of character. His trust in God had led to a rarer thing and taught him to trust man also. He was gentler than of old, for he found pity in his mind at the sight of those less fortunate than himself. He felt no personal land-hunger, and, had it been in his power, would have insured full term of years to his master; but upon his child henceforth he looked with respect, as one born to possessions. The unconscious Gregory Daniel already bulked in his parent's eyes as an owner of property. He longed for another boy and carefully planned small Gregory's education.

Sarah Jane went to see Woodrow a few days later, and they spoke intimately together—first of her and then of himself.

"Don't put off going to see your doctor till the weather turns."

"I have been."

"Never!"

"Yes—last Monday; and back again on Wednesday."

"'Twas good news, I hope?"

"Yes, I think so. Only I must go down to the sea for the winter. He will let me stop near at hand. I mean to take rooms at Dawlish. I shall be within reach there. You'll have to invent reasons for coming to see me sometimes."

"You wasn't no worse?"

"Not worth mentioning. I'll be all right down there. But it's rather like going into exile."

They spoke long about his health, his food, his winter clothes. She thought of these things, and had made him buy thicker and warmer garments.

Presently she asked him to come to the chapel of the Luke Gospellers.

"Mr. Matherson is a wonderful man, and that learned. The stars and the trees and the lightning come into his sermons. I do think you'd like them. As broad as charity he is—nought frights him."

"There are two Books," said Hilary; "and whether one was written by God is doubtful; but, God granted, there's no doubt about the other. Even Mr. Matherson won't deny who wrote the Book of Nature. And I'm glad he's not fool enough to forbid sane people from reading in it. But for me to hear him—would you have me play the hypocrite?"

"Why do you say that? There's no deceit. Ban't no harm to listen. Your conscience wouldn't say 'no' to that. You've often said you'd deny the light to none. He might change you."

"I only want to be changed when I feel death peeping at me by night. It might be very awkward for both of us if I was changed."

"I'm not thinking of that, but after. 'Twould be good to believe in a life beyond. You've often said so yourself."

"How many secrets will be carried on into that life—" there is such a life, I wonder?"

"Some, for certain—ours for one."

He laughed.

"And yet they say all will come to light then."

She shook her head resolutely.

"We must keep it safe through all eternity."

"There's God."

"What then? He don't want to turn Daniel's heaven into hell. Too large-hearted for that. He'll never tell it."

"Perhaps you and I won't be there, Sarah Jane."

"We shall be there. What would Daniel's heaven be without me, or you, for that matter?"

"You've set Dan's God a big puzzle. However, there will be no marrying or giving in marriage in heaven."

"Maybe not. But there's brains in heaven. Angels ban't bird-witted as well as bird-winged. Suppose the first thing my husband heard when he comed to die was that I'd done—the thing I have done? What would eternity be to him then? You know him—you can tell."

"He'd have larger views then."

"Daniel's Daniel. 'Twould be fire in his bones instead of marrow, for ever and ever. But God won't tell him, Hilary."

"I wouldn't trust God, all the same—not if I believed in God."

"'Twould be too cruel; and Dan thanking God so deep and pure and earnest every day and every night—and praying for you."

"May his God bless him a thousandfold."

"He has—through you."

"He's a grand character in his way. Prosperity has

sweetened him, so that he'd pick an insect out of his path nowadays rather than put any creature to pain."

"He's all for letting the world share the good that's come to him. And why shouldn't he thank God, Hilary? God's brought the good. I'll cleave to that—else how can I live?"

"Then so will I," he said. "God's my judge, but I'll believe in God too! Yet—yet once—not so long ago neither—I knew a lovely woman that claimed goodness rather hotly for man, and hated the sky to have all the praise when pleasant things were done!"

He looked out of the window, then he caressed her.

"I've changed from that," she said. "I clung to it awhile—then it gived way somehow. 'Tis easier to—to put it on God. All the same, I almost hate a man when he calls himself a lowly worm, as Daniel often does. And I know well that God don't like us to cry bad wares neither. Bain't no compliment to Him, anyway."

"Give man—and woman—the praise still. I like your old way best. You're a wonderful darling, and my whole life; and I'll think just what you please; and I'll come to hear your minister next Sunday—even that I'll do—for you and Daniel. Tell him that you nearly made me promise. Then he'll surely say a word next time we meet; and I'll relent and appear among the faithful! Is there a penitent's bench?"

CHAPTER III

JARRATT BECOMES A FATHER

DESPITE a promise, Hilary Woodrow did not visit the chapel of the Luke Gospellers. He caught a chill and kept the house for a fortnight. Then he decided that he must go immediately into the milder climate of the coast, and left Lydford for Dawlish. John Prout accompanied him and stopped for a few days.

At last the patience of Mary Weekes was rewarded, and she became mistress of the ivy-clad house, and the orchard, and the sweet water from the Moor that ran through her husband's little domain.

A child was to be born to her, and she felt glad that her own house would see the event. Susan still remained as maid-of-all-work; but she let it be understood that her services could not be depended upon for more than a year at the utmost. Then a certain square-built youth, called Bobby Huggins, one of Valentine's many grandchildren, intended to marry her. A cottage and a wife would be within his reach at the expiration of that time; and all men admitted that Bobby's deserts embraced both. He was an under-gamekeeper, and no more promising and steadfast spirit had ever shone in the great family of Huggins.

It happened that the patriarch himself called on Philip Weekes three days after Christmas, and accepted Hephzibah's invitation to stop and eat a mouthful.

"Master ban't home yet," she said; "though I believe I've made it clear to him for the last forty year that one o'clock's the dinner-hour in this house. But there—time be a word to him. 'Time was made for slaves,' he said once to me, in one of his particular foolish moments. 'Go along with you, you silly old monkey!' I answered

him. 'Time was made for humans, and we was no more expected to waste it like water, same as you do, than we was meant to waste corn and food and greenstuff and money.' But there—you know him. A watch he carries, but ain't got no more use for it than if he walked in New Jerusalem, where night and day will be done away with for evermore. Us'll begin, Mr. Huggins."

They ate and drank; then Philip joined them.

"I'm glad to see you," he said. "And I wish you a very happy New Year, Val, and a good few more yet."

"Thank you, thank you," answered the veteran. "I hope so too, I'm sure, for the balance of comfort in going on living be still my side, and will be while I've got such a rally of friendly neighbours wishing me to live. This be pretty drinking, sure enough. What do'e call it, Mrs. Weekes, if I ban't making a hole in my manners to ax?"

"'Tis broth made from the rames[1] of the Christmas goose," said Mrs. Weekes. "For richness there's nought like goose-bone soup—dripping with fatness, you might say. The very smell of it is a meal."

Presently Philip pressed Mr. Huggins to take a slice of cold plum-pudding, but the guest reluctantly refused.

"Daren't do it, though with all the will in the world, my dears," he declared. "Hot plum-pudding be death, but cold's damnation—using the word in its Bible sense. When you'm up home fourscore, such things must be passed by. Not but what I've had my share, and ate it without fear till seventy; but there's nowhere age tells crueller than in the power of the frame to manage victuals. Well I mind the feast when my granddarter, Hester—now Mrs. Gill—was married. Gill was to work at a wine merchant's in them days, and his master give him a bottle of glittering wine."

"Champagne, no doubt," said Mrs. Weekes.

"So it was then; and nothing would do but I must top up my other beverages with a glass of it, when it came to

[1] *Rames*—skeleton.

be taken at the end of the feast. Next day I wasn't hungry till four in the afternoon! 'Tis age upon me,' I said to myself. 'Tis the sure hand of age. Time was when I could have tossed off a quart of that frothy rubbish an' thought no more of it than a cup of tea; now the organs is losing their grip of liquid food, an' any fancy drinking defies them.' 'Tis the same with solids. If I was to partake of that Christmas pudden, 'twould harbour, like a cannon-ball, under the small ribs on my left side and stick there, very likely, till the spring, unless doctor could dislodge it."

"'Tis a bad thing to have the inner tubes out of order—nobody knows that better'n what I do," confessed Mrs. Weekes. "My unfortunate spasms be all owing to some lifelong failure in the tubes."

"Through peppermint comes salvation, however," murmured Philip.

He had just uttered this great truth when Susan rushed wildly upon them, and in doing so precipitated one of those identical agitations her aunt had just deplored.

"Lord save us, you little fool!" cried Philip. "Bursting into a room so—all endwise, like a frightened fowl! Don't you know your aunt better?"

"'Tis cousin Mary—she's took. Jar's gone for doctor, and Mrs. Taverner's along with her, and of course I come for Aunt Hepsy."

"Took! So like as not you're lying. 'Tis a fortnight afore the time."

"Don't know nothing about that," answered Susan. "But took she is—for good or evil—so you'd better come, I reckon. Anyway, she cried out for you the moment she got bad."

"A pretty darling, and well she might!" said Mrs. Weekes. "Thank the watching Lord she's in her own house, and the schoolmaster ain't there to add another terror to the scene."

"He is there," answered Susan. "He's in the parlour,

calculating exactly how long 'twill be in minutes afore Dr. Hext can get up from Bridgetstowe."

"Us'll soon have *him* out, anyhow," said Hephzibah. "Fetch down my grey shawl and black bonnet, and the basket as you'll find in the corner of my bedroom, Susan. All be there that's called for."

"One of the fore-handed ones, you," said Mr. Huggins with admiration.

"I believe so," she answered. "You've got to be fore-handed in matters of body and soul, Valentine Huggins; and them as ban't, get left behind in this world and forgot in the next."

She kicked off her slippers and drew on a pair of elastic-sided boots which stood by the fire. Then Susan brought her shawl and bonnet.

"Take the basket and I'll be after you," said Mrs. Weekes. "And as for you, Philip, you'll do well to wash up, bank the fire, put the kettle on the hob just near, to catch heat without boiling, and then come across to Jarratt's to see if there's anything I can set you upon. And, for the sake of pride, put a little more uprightness into your bearing. You slouch like a bachelor—always have; and yet afore another morning, if God so wills, you'll be a grandfather."

She whirled away, and the men were left alone. Mr. Huggins mopped his forehead.

"Lord, what a masterpiece among women! Don't she often bring the perspiration out on your brow?" he asked.

"Not now," answered Mr. Weekes. "I'm long past that."

Towards night the market woman's prophecy came true, and Philip was permitted to hold a granddaughter in his arms. The grandmother had saved the situation in her own opinion, and she only returned home, utterly exhausted in mind and body, at midnight. But Philip was even later, and the kitchen clock had rattled the hour of two before he left his son and returned to his wife. She slept heavily, but he ventured to wake her.

"Thought you'd like to know they be going to call the child 'Hephzibah,'" he said.

She uttered sleepy sounds.

"Jar's idea, I lay. I'm glad."

"'Twas my idea—I would have it," answered Philip.

"Mary's prettier, however. Better you hadn't interfered. But there'll be plenty of others. A long family they'll get, mark me. Don't you talk no more. I'm three parts dead to-night, and I wish you hadn't woke me."

He felt wounded and sighed. He had expected a little praise.

Sarah Jane was among the first who came to visit the new mother. She said many kind things of the child, spent an hour with secret thoughts in the house where Hilary Woodrow had lived, and then departed homeward again.

The day was stern and fresh. Easterly winds blew over the cradle of the New Year, and February had not thus far emptied her usual libation upon the earth. The Moor slept in the colours of mourning, and the wind seemed to bite into the very granite and shrivel up the humble life that dwelt thereon. Hazes hid the horizon, but the adjacent hills stood darkly out, clean-cut against the steel-grey sky. Lapwings chilled along her ways and beside the water a carrion crow or two sat with feathers puffed out. They rose heavily as Sarah Jane approached to cross the stepping-stones. Then, under Doe Tor, a man met her. He was riding a rough horse and bound for home; but now he stopped, and turned, and went back a part of the way to Ruddyford beside her.

"I've just been seeing Mary," she said. "I'm sure you're very fortunate. Nobody never had a braver li'l one."

"How are you?" he asked. "Why, 'tis six months since I've seed 'e—to speak to—or more."

"Very well, thank you."

"And your man and your youngster?"

"Well as possible."

He looked down at her and thought of the past, and smiled to himself.

"'Tis funny to you, no doubt, being in my house again. You must have missed Mr. Woodrow a bit, I should think."

"'Twas funny."

"What's the news of him? Do you ever go down to Dawlish to have a chat with him?"

Sarah Jane remembered that this man warned her husband against Woodrow. From that moment her attitude towards him had changed. And she had just heard another thing from his wife. Mary was anxious that Sarah Jane should be her child's godmother and Jarratt refused to permit it. He gave no reasons, but explained that he wished others to fill that position. This fact Brendon's wife had learned within the hour from her friend.

"Daniel and Mr. Prout go down from time to time and bide a night or two. I haven't," she said.

"Of course not. Yet I'm sure you miss him."

"Yes, I do."

"I never could see much in the man myself."

"You wouldn't. You'd never understand why anybody could overpay you for your house. To you that would be a fool's trick. No doubt you despise him for paying more for a thing than 'twas worth."

He laughed and shook his head.

"Oh no, Sarah Jane. That didn't surprise me at all, I assure you. He had his reasons. It suited—his health very well. 'Twas money well spent from his point of view; and well earned from mine. A lucky man—a very lucky man."

She disliked his tone with its suggestion of insolent superiority.

He leant over and patted her shoulder, whereupon she started indignantly away.

"Needn't be cross with me, my dear," he said. "Why, bless your life, I feel that intimate—however, since you're

not in an amiable mood seemingly, I'll go my way. Give my respects to Daniel. He's calling out for rain, I suppose."

She stopped and turned on him almost fiercely.

"Why for wouldn't you let me be godmother to your li'l girl?"

"Oh—that's it! What the mischief did Mary want to tell you that for? No offence, no offence at all, and you mustn't take it so. The reason—and yet I'm not sure if you'd understand. You're so out of the common, you know—such a large mind—so—how shall I put it now? 'Tis the difference betwixt you and your husband—the difference in your way of thinking. I'm a Christian man, Sarah Jane; but you—I ban't quite sure that you're a Christian woman; so all's said. But don't be angry about it; and don't tell Daniel, for 'twill only hurt his feelings, you see."

"Don't you think it. He can read me like print, and he knows I'm a better pattern of Christian than what you be, anyway. 'Tis a slight you've put on me—not that I care a straw what you think of me."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Why should you care? But I wouldn't hurt you for anything, Sarah Jane—much too fond of you for that. I know your virtues—nobody better. If you'd like to be godmother, you shall, bless your large heart! And don't try to quarrel with me, because I'll never let you. Them beautiful eyes—they make the sky ashamed these cold days!"

He rode away before she could answer, and left her in doubt of his meaning. The words he said were nothing, but the easy familiarity of his tone exasperated her. She determined with herself that now, even if pressed to be his child's godmother, she would refuse.

And Jarratt Weekes, returning to Lydford, met another of the Ruddyford folk. He was passing with a nod, when John Prout stopped him. The ponies rubbed noses, and then Prout turned and rode for a while beside the other.

"Funny I should chance on you," said Jarratt. "I've

just been having speech along with Sarah Jane Brendon. 'Tis the salt of life to me to see that woman carry her lovely head so high—knowing what I know."

"Weekes," answered the old man, "I want to pray you by all that you hold sacred, by the prosperity that's yours, by your wife and by your child, and by your God—yes, by your God—to let this pass over. Forget it you can't—no more can I—but don't let it be a part of your life, or your thoughts. Don't let it enter into your mind, as a thing to be used. Which of us can live his whole life with the blind up? 'Twas a fatal accident, and I'm not saying a word against sin—my hair be the greyer for it—but—oh, man, don't harbour it; don't hug it, for God's sake—same as you be doing now. I know—I know. I read it in your face every time you and me meet in company. I——"

"Stop," interrupted Weekes. "You're wasting your wind, Prout. And you're quite mistaking me. Everyone of us, if we keep our eyes open, hoard a harvest in our memories and collect all sorts of things gleaned up out of the world. Some of the gatherings may be useful, some may not be useful. You never know. A man's memory be like a woman's boxes—full of all sorts; and the wisest man keeps all in order, so as he'll know where to put his finger on anything if he wants it. He may die without using some of the things stored up—or he may find he needs 'em in a hurry any minute. That's how 'tis with me."

"What sort of Christian be that who hoards what he knows another creature would dearly wish destroyed? You mean to strike these people when the time comes and you hunger for the chance to do it."

"Not a bit. I'm in no hurry to roll 'em over, I do assure you. 'Live and let live' is a very good motto. And 'Let sleeping dogs lie' be another worth remembering. But as to laughing at a good joke—that I always shall do. And the cream of the joke is the fix you be in. For if you

wasn't here, I should have no witness; but since you be here, I can blow Brendon to the devil when I like. 'Tis amusing in itself to feel so much stronger than that very strong chap."

"He's never wronged you—more have they—her and the master."

"How do you know that?"

"You'd never do it as a Christian man, Jarratt Weekes."

"As a Christian man I ought to do it. 'Twould be a good Christian deed, surely, to let the light in on that darkness, and so save the woman's soul alive. But it might be a tragical mess if it got out: that I'm free to grant; and I've no intention whatever of saying a word. I'm a very patient man, and can stand hard knocks as well as most. We'll wait and watch, and see what sort of friend Brendon will be to me presently. I've just offered Sarah Jane to be my baby's gossip; so you see I don't harbour no ill-will against the dear creature herself—who could? So long, and keep warm against this piercing wind. Good men are scarcer every day, John Prout!"

Jarratt rode away, leaving in the old man's mind a deep uneasiness, somewhat similar in quality to that he had just awakened in the soul of Daniel Brendon's wife.

CHAPTER IV

THE FARMER COMES HOME

Hilary Woodrow returned home during the latter part of May, and Ruddyford rejoiced to see him. But despite his assurances, all found him a little changed. He was tolerably active and cheerful, yet thinner than of yore, and his love of the saddle had decreased. He rode abroad less than formerly, and he read more; but he showed no indifference to the minor questions of the passing hour. Of old, nothing was too small for him to bestow thought upon it; and he still liked to be consulted as to the affairs of his farm.

Yet in certain particulars it seemed that he had slightly changed his attitude to most things.

"'Tis more like a visitor in the house, somehow, than the master," said Peter Lethbridge to Daniel; and the other admitted it.

"Too easy for a master now," he answered. "'Tis a very bad sign in my opinion, and I shall have a tell with him about it."

He was as good as his word, and explained his uneasiness in very clear language.

"I feel I'm largely the cause of this," he declared while once they walked together homeward from the railway station of Lydford. "It hurts me terrible—'tis as though you felt Ruddyford was gone already. I wish to God you'd burn them papers, and put dying out of your mind. If I may say so, you'm a man running to meet the end of life. And you, please Heaven, with thirty years of usefulness before you."

"I like you to say these things, Dan; because it shows you're the same always. You don't change. I wish we were all as steadfast. But to be honest with you, I'm

come to a time when the rest of the road can be seen pretty clear. The things that make life worth living shrink very small as soon as life ceases to be worth living."

"Life's worth living while we've got the power left to think a good thought."

Woodrow did not answer for some time. Then he said:

"I want you to go to Bristol for me next month. Don't think I've lost interest in my farm and my stock. There's a sale there of pedigree stuff, and I've ideas. I'll buy three beasts—a bull and two heifers."

"They'll cost a mint of money."

"Why not?"

Brendon rejoiced.

"A pity there ban't more with your great ideas on Dartymoor. The place is the best grazing ground in England, yet who knows its worth? I'll go, and gladly. You must put a limit on the purchases if 'tis an auction."

"I'll tell you to-night, if you'll come in for an hour. How's little Gregory this morning?"

Daniel's animation waned somewhat.

"Not all us could wish—fretful seemingly, and off his food. Sarah Jane be going to have doctor to him if he ban't better next week."

"Don't put it off."

"He's growing that fast."

"A very good lad—more like you than his mother. You'll make a farmer of him, Daniel?"

"I mean to. 'Twas my hope us should have had another boy to grow up with him—but——"

"Plenty of time."

A month later Brendon started for Bristol. It was a great incident, and his wife and he felt much excited about it. She had so far seen but little of Hilary since his return; now, during the three days' absence of Daniel, it became possible to spend some hours in the master's company.

By appointment they met in the old peat-works, but the relation between them was different from of old. Woodrow's fever had departed with possession; his appetence had quite faded. Now he loved her, with all his soul rather than with all his heart. The words were his own, and she questioned them.

"'Tis a higher thing, no doubt, and I'm thankful you feel so," she said. "'Twill surely grow up so great in you that all else will be forgot. I wish I could see more of you, and look to your comfort closer. Tabitha's a kind woman, but hard at the edges."

They sat in the great empty drum at the peat-works. It was dry and littered with sweet fresh fern, for Sarah Jane sometimes climbed thither to reflect and think upon the dead, when leisure served. She brought the child with her to play in the peat, and liked to see him at his games, because she knew that his grandfather would have loved the sight. On these occasions he was allowed to play with the famous knife. Then Sarah Jane hid it safely until their next visit.

Where now they sat, she could see the little figure busy with rusty tools that a man had used in earnest, though in vain. Upon Gregory Friend's death the last spark of human life departed from Amicombe Hill, and now only Nature worked there.

Woodrow reclined beside Sarah Jane, and stroked her hand. From time to time came the thud of a hoof, where his horse was tethered close by.

"And yet," she said, "to hear you put your soul afore your heart be a wonder, Hilary, for 'twas only a little time agone that you'd have none of the word. I be glad and sorry both to hear you say it. Glad because it makes you a thought happier."

"Why sorry?" he asked.

"I don't know—down deep in me I be. Can't find a word for it. 'Tis giving up something in my feeling to put anything afore our bodies When I think of father, I see

his round shoulders and beard and shining eyes. I'm so small-minded, I can't fancy them I love save in their dear flesh."

"You beautiful thing! Well may you say it—such a queen of the flesh as you are! But for me 'tis different. A pain-stricken wretch, sinking away back to the dust so fast."

"Don't say that. 'Tis only your hands be thinner, because you never use 'em save for turning the pages of books. I do wish you'd be on your horse more."

"I know—I know. Man cannot live by books alone. I'll do everything. But think—what a great, precious thought—to believe there's a time after! Aren't you glad I've got to believe that?"

"Do you believe it?"

"I do."

"I'll say no hard thing against your books no more then. Somehow—after what fell out—I wanted to be the same as you. I was torn in half between Dan and you; and sometimes I thought heaven would be good, and oftener I couldn't see how. Then I felt as if the sleep without end and without dreams that you trusted to was best. But if you and Daniel both think for sure that there's a time coming will find us alive for ever, and no growing old in it—then I'll believe it too—I must."

"Believe it," he said. "'Tis worth anything. We call death endless sleep and all the rest of it, to make it sound less terrible; but that is only playing with words. Death is dust if it is the end. I prayed to God—the God I didn't believe in—to make me believe. Such vain things will a sad heart do. Not vain either, for He heard and answered. The sea it was that fetched the answer. Miles and miles I tramped along lonely shores and watched the waves. They brought the idea of endlessness so near to me. My watch in my pocket ticked time; but the great, sad-coloured waves beat out eternity. I want to walk on that beach with you and see the water-scythes sweep round and mow

the sand. And when the sand sighs I feel it is the sigh of the weary earth, that knows no rest from the unwearying sea. The sea's a better lover than I was. Twice a day he worships the shore."

"I might come maybe when autumn's back. A change would do the child good belike."

"Well thought. What more natural? Somehow I want you there—just to walk over the sand and hear the long sob and hopeless sigh of sea against stone. It will force you to believe in your soul, Sarah Jane."

"Do it make you glad—this new feeling?"

"Yes, it does. It opens out so many doors to hope. It teaches so much. I told you once that if there was another world, there was a God. It is so."

"Do it make right and wrong plainer?"

"In time—in time it will. I've flung over a lot of old opinions already. 'Tis like parting with the very stuff of your brain; for my thoughts were my life—till you came into it. But you—you've taught me such a lot too. You taught me that truth was beyond our reach—that was a great piece of learning. Once hold that and comfort grows out of it—a sort of desolate comfort to a hungry heart—still comfort. Truth's got to be softened behind a veil for things with no more intellect than we have. The stark, naked light would blind us for ever and make us mad. God knows that. Truth is God's face, Sarah Jane."

She was secretly amazed at this great mental change in him. For his sake she was glad, because he had evidently welcomed the possibility of a new belief that was strong to throw hope over the present desert of his mind. With weakened physical circumstances, reason had also weakened; but Woodrow believed otherwise and told himself that unimpaired intellectual powers, working unceasingly on the problem he conceived to be paramount, had at last purged his understanding and lifted him into a purer belief. He was, moreover, proud that he had attained to this triumph by the exercise of what he believed to be pure reason. He

doubted not that such faith as he had now attained was the only faith worthy of mankind.

But in the woman's heart lurked something akin to regret. She could not name the emotion; she lacked words to analyze it; but she knew that it was there; and while her nature leapt to gladness—because Hilary was glad—behind the joy persisted something of disquiet and even distrust.

"I'll be well pleased to think like you do, then," she said; "but—but, oh, Hilary, for God's sake don't you grow to think like Daniel do—else—else——"

He shook his head.

"Never fear that—that would be to go down the hill—not up it. It's cost the life-work of my brains to get where I have got, dear heart. I shan't go backward now."

Presently she left Woodrow and went to her child. Then Gregory and his mother set off homeward.

The farmer watched them sink—a large spot and a little one—into the waste. Presently he rose and mounted his horse. He thought long upon Sarah Jane and that last note of fear—so foreign to her fearless voice. He reflected, too, upon his own altered attitude and sublimated affection for her. He supposed that belief in immortality must be a force very elevating to the human mind; he doubted not that it lifted glorious flowers when once the root struck down and flourished. He considered the great matter from divers points of view, but not from one. He did not know that decaying physical circumstances frequently open the door to superstition and make a fading intellect succumb before what, in full vigour of intellectual life, it scorned.

The day chimed with his mood, and he told himself very honestly that none could gaze upon this outspread world and believe that it represented but a display of natural laws, a casual compact of heat and light and substance, a chance conglobation of matter whirling beautifully about the sun's throne at the moment of summer solstice.

The light of noon shone over the world. Cloud shadows flew along the silvery planes of the earth's surface, and

life teemed in a myriad shapes even to the pinnacles of the land. Day herself scarcely died now, and night was a shadow rather than a darkness. Even in the midnight watches, light, like a ghost, stole under the stars and behind the northern hills until day returned. So spirits might haunt the nether gloom, he fancied, ere they vanished again at the glorious advent of day.

To Woodrow, gazing upon the June world, it seemed that he was the only faulty thing in the visible universe; and he longed to cast his slough and also be without fault.

CHAPTER V

THE FRUIT OF FAITH

MATTERS fell out much as Hilary Woodrow desired. He returned to Dawlish in October, and soon afterwards Brendon brought his wife and child to the sea.

His master and he took long walks together among the Haldon hills, and Daniel learnt with enormous satisfaction that the other had of late experienced great changes of spirit. The big man gloried in this fact from a personal point of view, because it appeared to justify his immense faith in prayer. He had petitioned Heaven for Hilary Woodrow; and here dawned the answer. Daniel doubted not that this was the beginning of a larger and deeper conversion. He urged Woodrow to go farther.

"There's no standing still," he said. "There's no standing still for you now—no more than the light stands still when the sun rises. Brighter and brighter surely it must grow, till the full light of the Gospel of the Son of God warms your heart. Man! what's deeper than that, what shows all clearer than that—or throws a darker shadow—the shadow of our sins?"

"What a preacher you are!"

"'Tis the good tidings of what you say. They make even my slow mind move quick. 'Ye believe in God, believe also in Me'; 'tis that I'm thinking."

"Ah, Dan, that's a very different matter."

"God'll show you 'tis the same."

Thus oftentimes they talked; then work called Brendon, and he went home again. But his wife and child stopped for some weeks longer beside the sea; because little Gregory gained benefit from the change, and Sarah Jane was anxious to remain for his sake.

The old-time fires were now banked deep in Daniel's mind under the changes and chances of his life. Jealous he was, since a large power of jealousy pertained to his nature; but for Woodrow he had long since failed to feel anything but the staunch devotion of a brother. Apart from this emotion, awakened by the circumstance of the farmer's personal goodness to him, another far deeper, begot of natural instinct, told him that Hilary was harmless now. Whatever his attitude towards Sarah Jane had been, the very openness of their friendship and the close intimacy of their conversation under his own eyes and before his own ears, had convinced the husband that no shadow of danger existed in their relations. The past in truth was dead enough, and Brendon, a man of clean mind, despite jealousy, made the mistake of supposing that it had never been. He went further and, looking backward, blamed himself for an unseemly attitude, and confessed his sin to his Maker.

The past was dead, and neither Hilary nor Sarah Jane,

as they walked together at the edge of the winter sea, sought or thought upon its grave. Far otherwise, she found that in the light of his new opinions he could now bitterly mourn the past. On a grey day, when a slight shore wind smoothed the water and the sea was almost of the same colour as the gulls that floated upon it, the man and woman sat under shelter of a red cliff, talked together, and watched Sarah Jane's child gathering cowry shells upon the beach.

"How your husband rejoices in his God! Have you marked it, Sarah Jane? Such a trust and such a great, live gratitude underlying his scrupulous obedience."

"Well he may be grateful."

"I'm only a child in knowledge of the divine idea. He's got far beyond that. And yet—sometimes—I wonder what would happen to his religion—and to us—if he knew."

"I don't wonder. I know what would happen. He might be sorry after—when 'twas too late—but while the storm was raging in his heart, God's self wouldn't hold him."

"I understand."

"And I wouldn't blame him neither. Think—the solid earth giving way under his feet. 'Twould be no less to him."

"It's very awful—considered in that manner. I hope you're wrong."

"The sea would be weak and the rocks would be soft compared to him."

"You've never felt he ought to know?"

She gasped and stared.

"My God! No, I haven't."

"Sometimes I have, Sarah Jane."

Her eyes rested on him in profound and horrified amazement.

"You can say that! Believing in God has brought you to that! Then I wish you'd never come to it, Hilary Woodrow."

"I have almost felt that if I lived very much longer, I might tell him."

"You won't live much longer afterwards, if you do. He's said to me in naked words, that 'tis no sin to kill them as have done what we have done. His Bible is behind him."

"Nevertheless, if you were dead, I should tell Brendon."

"I'm not dead, and I don't want to die. You—you to say this awful thing to me! I feel as if I was going mad. I can't believe it. I won't believe 'tis you talking. You—knowing all you know'!"

Something akin to indignation trembled in her voice; and he marked it and felt shame.

"The thought came to me in a dream," he declared. "Of course it's unthinkable awake. But I wanted to hear how it would sound."

She was much moved.

"It sounds like a bell tolling," she said. "You grow to be such an own-self man now—along of finding God, I suppose. You think to tell Brendon would ease your soul, no doubt. But what about his? You've come to reckon that you did wrong—that I did wrong—but can't you see what might be rest to your mind is hell for his? Don't you know him well enough to know what it would mean to him? I can see the things that would happen—like a row of awful——there, you've made my brain whirl; you've throwed me into a maze of terror for that man."

The other noticed that not a thought of fear for herself influenced Sarah Jane. Neither did she concern her mind with him after his confession. Her husband filled her heart.

Hilary pacified her and quite agreed with her; he laughed at her fervour and declared that his God and her husband's were as different as love from hate; that his God was hers, not Daniel's. She made no answer; but the reflection that even from the fantasies of a dream he could pluck such an idea and utter it in her ears, transformed her feeling

towards him from that hour for ever. The shock of this experience aged the spirit within her. She returned home at the appointed time; and was glad to be home. But her mental life had changed.

CHAPTER VI

PHILIP FALLS

PHILIP WEEKES considered that all men might be divided into two classes: those who knew their own minds, and those who did not. His wife and son both belonged to the smaller category; himself he numbered with the majority and confessed that there were occasions when he found himself not in two minds, but twenty.

With winter, Fate passing through Lydford, perceived the amazing prosperity of all who bore the famous local name of Weekes, and from her bitter lemon squeezed a little verjuice. Jarratt experienced some bad fortune and lost more than he could afford to lose in a copper mine on the east side of the Moor; while Philip himself fell ill. It was the attitude of Mrs. Weekes at the time of this latter unparalleled misfortune that served so greatly to bewilder the huckster. He had fought against his indisposition valiantly and only retired upon medical compulsion; but it was quite as much fear of the consequences, if he went to bed, as a valiant indifference to physical misery that kept him on his legs until the last moment.

He drove Mrs. Weekes to Lydford station as usual on a market day, and then returned home, feeling exceedingly unwell. A doctor called twice weekly at the village, and fortunately he might be seen at his surgery upon Saturdays. When Hephzibah came back her son Jarratt was waiting with the pony-trap, and she learnt the amazing news that the master was ill in bed.

"Guy Fawkes and good angels!" cried Mrs. Weekes. "Philip down! Push the pony along for the love of the Lord, Jar. Who's with him?"

"Mary runs in and out, and Susan, and Mrs. Taverner have been very kind."

"Poor lamb! poor helpless lamb!" said the wife.

Ever in extremes, she now poured forth a torrent of praise and extolled the immense virtues of Philip. She also dwelt on his practical value and her own imperishable affection and admiration for him.

"Such men go down to the grave with nobody but God Almighty and their wives to mark them," she said. "'Twill be a case of 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant' if he goes. But it mustn't be. It shan't be!"

"He's not in the least danger, mother."

"Danger!—how can you dare to use the word? Oh, my God, to think of the staff and prop of my life tottering—and me not there! 'Danger'!—you ought to be a better son than to say it. Why for wasn't a telegram sent off? What do Mary know of sickness?"

Jarratt grunted.

"If she don't, she's a fool then. Another child coming and the first always got something wrong with it."

"There—to think—that poor martyr! I knowed there was something wrong—felt it in my bones all yesterday. 'God send Mary's all right,' I said again and again to myself in market. But little did I think of master. I fancied 'twas no more than just a running at the nose—and all the time he was suffering agonies, no doubt. The bravery of the man! Lash the pony, can't 'e, or I'll get out and

go afoot. How long are we to take? I'm itching to be at him!"

Mrs. Weekes soon reached home, and swiftly swept the neighbours out of the house.

"He'm asking for you, Aunt Hepsy," said Susan. "He'm very peaceful, with his medicine, an' a Bible, an' the kettle 'pon the fire; and blacksmith have made a proper long spout for the kettle as the doctor ordained, so the steam can get to him."

"You go off, you chattering magpie," began Mrs. Weekes; then she hastened up to the head of the house, and found him pretty comfortable, but very crestfallen and full of the humblest apologies.

"Awful sorry," he croaked. "I blush for myself, I'm sure."

"Don't you talk—not a word. I'll do the talking for once, you poor fallen creature! It do tear me to pieces to see you thrust into your bed, in the full vigour of manhood, like this. And never a groan—you valiant boy! But now I be back, us shall soon have 'e on your feet again. You trust to me! Be you easy? Where's the pain? I'd sooner fight evils above the navel than below it, as I have always maintained. Don't say 'tis the stomach—don't say that. But your poor cracked voice tells me all I want to know."

"'Tis the breathing parts, my dear."

"And you brave as an army about it, and never told me, and let me desert you without a thought. You wonderful man! I wish to God there was more like you. Let me look in your face. Good! Don't you fear any harm, Philip. While the white of your eye be so clear, there's no danger. You'll come through all right."

"No danger, I'm sure. I can drink soup as easy as anything. But 'tis the ill-convenience of upsetting the bedroom so."

"Like your big mind to think of it; but what's a bedroom to me? I don't want no bedroom while you'm

stricken down. Not a wink of sleep shall I have, till doctor says you can rise up again. And to think I never guessed, so quiet you kept it! When Jar showed hisself at the station —even then I didn't seem to know what had kept you. 'Where's that beetle of a man, Philip Weekes?' I asked, in my brisk, cheerful way. 'Struck down,' says Jarratt; and you could have flung me into the air. I was blowed out with sudden terror, like a balloon."

"I did ought to have a bowl of something to lap at about mid-day, according to doctor's orders—not that I want it if 'twill be troubling you," said Mr. Weekes.

"So you shall, then; an' the fat of the land shall you have, as becomes such a man; an' wine, if I've got to sell my shoes for it—good, black port wine—as good as Noah Pearn have got in the house—you shall drink—bottles and bottles—till your very blood be wine! There's nought makes blood like what port does."

She set to work from that moment and toiled unceasingly until Mr. Weekes had passed the crisis of his illness, and was pronounced convalescent. Then she nearly fed him to death, praised God for His mercies, and wearied the whole street of Lydford with nursing details, with symptoms and their treatment, with the particulars of diet, with enthusiastic comments on the majestic attitude of mind preserved by Philip throughout his sufferings.

Presently neighbours called, and were allowed to have speech with the invalid. Philip's eyes had been giving him some trouble, and during his illness the doctor had prescribed a pair of glasses. These were now made, and Mr. Weekes was proud of them, and pleased with the appearance of himself in them. Adam Churchward visited him, and admired his spectacles.

"It brings out the natural thoughtful bent of your countenance, if I may say so. You'll find them a great comfort and support without a doubt. For my part, strange though it may seem, I have to put on my glasses now—not only to

see with, but to think with. My mind refuses to move freely until I feel them on the bridge of my nose."

"It clears print something wonderful," explained Philip, "and of late, for want of power to do anything useful, I've sunk down to reading the newspaper, and found it very interesting. I've had a good dash at the Word too; and 'tis curious to see that fighting was just as bloody a job in Old Testament days as it be now. The only difference is that then they always knowed which side the Lord was, afore they went to war; and now we never know till afterwards. If the Almighty took the same pleasure in England as He done in Israel, we should just walk over the earth."

"A very wise remark," declared Mr. Churchward; "I can see the glasses are steadying your mind already."

"He be so vain of 'em as a turkey-cock," said Mrs. Weekes, who sat beside her husband's bed. "Why, it minds me of the time Jarratt was born. Then the airs and graces this man give himself! 'Twas every minute, 'Where's my son? Where's my boy Jarratt to?' And now 'tis 'Where's my glasses?' 'Here, let me get on my glasses!'"

"I like a middle-aged face to look wise," declared Mr. Churchward. "There's no more shameful thing in nature than an elderly fool. Yet one meets them—people over whose heads life has passed and not brought a single thoughtful line. Poor, smooth-faced souls! Why, the very beasts that perish as doth the grass of the field look wiser, and undoubtedly are wiser, as they grow older."

"No good growing old if you don't grow artful, for certain," said Mrs. Weekes. "And another thing is that they fools are far more harmful than the knaves. A knave makes clean work, but a fool botches all. Everybody knows that. Why, you men—Lord bless you!—I see through the pack of you, like windows!"

"You do your best, as I do, to inculcate wisdom," answered the schoolmaster. "For my part I may say that

I leave no stone unturned to implant it in the rising genera tion. Sow enough seed and some will undoubtedly germinate in a satisfactory manner. We never know how great a matter may be kindled by a flash of sense bursting in upon the youthful mind. And, in your case, you don't deny your immense fund of common sense to the humblest who asks for it. I suppose that nobody in Lydford gives more good advice in the course of a twelvemonth than you do, Mrs. Weekes. Nathaniel Spry is sound also."

"Him!" returned Hephzibah with contempt. "What does he know, more than how many penny stamps make twelve, or how to weigh a parcel, or write a gun license? How can he know anything, living out his life behind the counter in that stuffy little post-office?"

"I was going to admit that his experience of the world is rather limited; but he is a great reader, and has nourished his intellect on the learning of wiser men than himself. His advice generally comes out of a good book, and is therefore pretty well to be relied upon."

"As to advice," she answered. "'Tis taking it, not giving it that matters. If a man or woman agrees with you, and falls in with every word, and thanks you over and over again—then you may feel perfectly sure they won't follow a syllable and have only come to waste your time. 'Tis them that argue, and wrangle, and sulk, and ax your reasons, and go away in a temper with you—'tis them that be most likely to profit by what you've said."

A voice cried from below stairs.

"Can Valentine come up to see father?"

"He can," answered Mr. Weekes; and a moment later old Huggins creaked upstairs, followed by Jarratt.

"You'd better go, schoolmaster. You've had your turn," said Hephzibah. "Philip mustn't see too much company all at once."

Adam, therefore, withdrew, and Mr. Huggins took his place.

"I heard the joyful news as you was your own man

again, and soon to come down house," said the patriarch; "therefore nothing would do but what I must walk up and have a look at you. Not changed a hair, thank God."

"He's fatter," said Mrs. Weekes. "The idleness have put flesh on him—round as a tub he have grown. You'm inches deep in lard, ban't you, my old dear?"

"I believe I am," answered Philip. "But I'll work it off again so soon as I get on my legs. It shows how little us be wanted, Val, that though we may be struck down, the world goes on just the same. Now I've often thought, in my vainglorious way, what would become of all my Indian game birds if anything happened to me. Yet they was never better, and be laying as free as Nature can make 'em, so missis tells me."

"'Tis this here wonderful woman," said Huggins. "You'm one of the fortunates, you are. 'Be dashed if Hephzibah Weekes don't know how to be in two places to once!' I said not long since to Noah Pearn. And he answered 'twas the cleverest thing he'd ever heard me say."

"Philip's going to be let out of bed to-morrow," said Mrs. Weekes. "And he'll come down house the day after."

"The spring weather will soon set him up."

"Spring be here without a doubt," she answered. "That dear angel boy of Sarah Jane's comed in along with his father yester-eve; and he fetched as fine a bunch of primrosen as you could wish to see. But the darling had picked 'em without stalks, as childer will, so they was flinged away so soon as his li'l back was turned."

"A very promising start to the year, I do think," said Mr. Huggins. "A good deal of prosperity in the country, and very great promise of hay—so John Prout tells me."

"What was the news of Mr. Woodrow?"

"I named him. He've wintered pretty well—ban't worse nor better. Daniel Brendon be going down to him for a few days, and 'tis hoped he'll come home first week in June."

"Good luck all round, then."

"You forget me," said Jarratt, who had been standing with his hands in his pockets, looking out of the window. "But one man's ill-fortune don't matter, I suppose."

"I heard as Wheal Cosdon was looking up again," answered Mr. Huggins.

"You heard wrong. 'Tis as like as not 'twill be knacked in autumn. 'Twas a damned swindle; but they promoters be on the windy side o' the law, as usual, and us, who put in our hard-earned savings, get nought."

"Can't you have the law of nobody about it?" asked his father.

"No, I can't. The rogues be safe enough. The law's their side."

"I'd like to poison the traitors with the arsenic they've digged out of the place," cried Hephzibah. "To steal the bread from the mouths of men and women and children; and eat it themselves—the anointed robbers! 'Tis a shameful thing to think in a Christian land the laws should all be made with an eye to the comfort of the rich."

"Can't be otherwise—so long as the rich make 'em," ventured Philip.

"With all your natural needs and requirements in the big life you lead, it must be a terrible crash to have to put down your servant, as they tell me you think of doing," said Huggins to Jarratt Weekes.

"I must face it. I like ease and comfort as well as anybody—especially since I earned it by my own hard work. But we must cut the coat as the cloth allows. Ban't no good thirsting for half a pint, if you haven't got three-halfpence."

Valentine, however, doubted the philosophy of this sentiment.

"Don't say so. You'm leaving out of your reckoning all the Good Samaritans that be about the world, and the beauty of human nature in general."

"Human nature's all rot. Anyway, it isn't the thirsty folks that human nature asks to drink."

"Yet I've had scores and scores gratis and for nothing in my time," declared Mr. Huggins. "Eighty year old am I, and if I could tell 'em up, I make no doubt that I should find I'd had barrels over one counter and another —all out of the goodness of my fellow-creatures, without a thought of any return. Not but what I haven't stood oceans of drink in my time too. But gratitude's the thing —an' rarer even than generosity. I'm exceedingly grateful for all the free beer I've had, and I won't hear you tell that human nature's rot, just because you are a bit under the weather. Your luck will come uppermost presently—then you'll think different."

"Good sense, Val. Cheer him up if you can," said Mrs. Weekes. "And now you men had best to get off, for Philip must have his dinner."

CHAPTER VII

A CHRISTIAN CONVERT

With another summer Hilary Woodrow again returned to his home, and time passed as during previous years. But the passage of the last winter had left its mark upon him, and the least observant noticed a change. Physically he had grown thinner. His cheek-bones thrust out, and there were hollows beneath them. He still rode, and he still read; but his books belonged now to a different plane of thought, and a man by glancing at them might have cal-

culated with pretty close accuracy the nature of his bent, and the slow but sure victory of faith over reason.

In some respects he looked younger, for a colour that means health in infancy and death at adolescence, lighted his fallen cheek. His eyes were bright; his manner continued courteous and kind as of yore; his energies were not yet much decreased, save in certain directions. From predisposition he had gradually passed into actual disease; and as the bodily fires waned and cooled, his interest in the superhuman waxed and dominated every waking hour. He believed in a life beyond the grave; he had infected the domain of reason by deep reading of irrational authors; and these created an atmosphere through which he groped his way back to the faith of his fathers.

Sarah Jane held secret speech with him, at oncoming of another autumn, and the great matter arose upon his lips. This happened towards the end of his stay at home, when already it became necessary to think of leaving the Moor. First he treated of his health, and confessed, to her grief, that he was not so well; then he discussed the superstitions now supremely precious to him.

"What will you say when I tell you that I have followed in the path of many and many a greater man than myself, and changed my opinions?" he asked.

"I know it," she answered. "You told me nine months agone at Dawlish. You believe in God and heaven; and so do I with all my heart."

"But I've gone beyond that—higher—higher. We *must* believe in that, when our eyes are opened to read the meaning of the world—or even a glimpse of the meaning. Looking back, I tremble to see what a dreadful, lonely thing I was—walking here in my pride. But God's too great a thought for the mind of man to grasp single-handed. I've come to see there must be something between—something within reach of human intellect—something that man's mind can understand and even love—something that will bring the divine light to us, yet soften its wonder and terror, so that

we can gaze upon it. Without Christ, the idea of God dazzles and blinds and bewilders. With Christ, the thought can be received and taken home into our hearts. The only possible God for man is made clear to us by the Son of God. Therefore I am a Christian, Sarah Jane."

Frank but fleeting anxiety filled her eyes as they opened widely to regard him. Great excitement was manifested by Hilary. An expression she had never seen there shone in his countenance as he spoke. It was the same light that she knew as a familiar beacon upon her husband's face; but there it glowed steady and flameless; here it shot up and played like fire.

"You believe all that my Dan believes?"

"All. Oh, Sarah Jane, the grief of it is greater than the joy; for who, when the light comes, but must look back as well as forward? If I could only look forward! But a man in my case sees the past clear enough—clearer and clearer as the sun sets upon it. My sun-setting will be stormy now. I should have died happy enough with the glorious thought of you and the past; but now 'tis just that thought that will darken all."

"Can't you forget? The years and years it was ago! The scores and scores of things that have happened since."

"I can't forget. I lament it—I lament for it with my whole heart and soul. I mourn it waking and moan for it sleeping. I'd die a hundred deaths if the time could come again."

"This be Christianity?"

"Yes; it shows that I have not deceived myself. I am a Christian—therefore this thing that I have done torments me."

"How it festers in your mind! I've forgot it—very near. Many a dream that I dream seems more real to me than that."

"It's the only reality left in my life."

"Then I wish you'd die quick and be at peace," she said

fiercely. "I love you so dear that I can wish that for you!"

"I'm dying fast enough—yet not fast enough. I'm impatient now to see what mercy means—mercy and forgiveness. I shall know soon. How clear the stages are, Sarah Jane! I wonder if they are so clear with you? First joy and pride in what I'd done; then content and a blessed memory to look back upon; then, as disease got hold of me, and I had to begin to fight for life, clouds came between me and the past. Then the first sharp twinge of regret, as my soul began to waken; then sorrow; then frantic, undying grief and a vain agony of longing that I'd not sinned so damnably against those I loved best in the world. Have you felt so, Sarah Jane?"

"Never," she said. "I wept fire for a week after; I was half raving for joy and half raving for misery—mad like. Then I put it all behind me. Things stronger than me—or you—worked that deed. I'll pay the price, if I must. I didn't do it for myself—you know that."

"Can't you feel for my sufferings?"

At the bottom of her heart flashed a passing scorn; but she expelled it and blamed only his unhappy physical decay.

"'Twill all be made up if what you think is right. Your Christ will be so pleased with you for being sorry, that He'll forgive you everything—and me too. We sinners are His sort. The just persons go into heaven without any fuss, by all accounts. 'Tis such as we are—weak, wicked, good-for-noughts—that the angels will blow their trumpets for."

Hilary was astonished at her attitude and its satire—the more terrible because quite unconscious.

"What would Daniel say to that?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered. "And I don't care."

Then her outlook utterly changed at a breath.

"Yet that's folly, if justice be anything," she continued. "And I do care—care with all my might. 'Tis the like of Daniel—pure in heart and soul, the faithful servant of

his God, that must go in first. And so he should. If heaven's waiting, 'tis Dan and my dear, dear father, and such as them—not me and you—will be put first. 'Tis for their sakes I ever think or care about it, or want to go there. For their sakes. But for them and my little boy, I'd sooner go nowhere. I've had nearly enough of living anywhere—beautiful though 'tis to be alive. I don't want much more of it—not now you've said this to me."

"May you live long—very, very long—long enough to forgive me."

"You needn't say things like that," she answered. "The more you heap all this misery on your own head, the less I'm likely to blame you. I never did—not even in thought. 'Twould have been a coward's part. 'Twas no more than a bitter bargain, when all's said."

"How can you have the heart to speak so?"

"Because I ban't the religious creature you are, I suppose. Let the dead past be—or you'll fret yourself to death afore your time."

"Daniel is never out of my thoughts. Sometimes I feel almost as though I could fling myself on the ground at his feet and, for my peace of mind, tell all."

"So you said last year, and made my heart stand still. Yet 'tis a cruel, selfish wish—even for a full-blown new Christian, I should reckon. I loathed you for it at the time, and my thoughts choked me to think as a man who—to think such a wish could come to you. But now I'm changed too. 'Tis all one to me what you do, so far as I'm concerned, and I'd tell Dan myself, if he was anything but what he is. Not for fear of him do I keep dumb—God He knows that—but for love of him. For great love of his dear self I want the past to be dead and buried. If it would better Dan to tell it, I'd tell it; if my death would help his life and his power of goodness, and fix him any stronger and surer with heaven, I'd die laughing. But what would hap to him if he knew? Would it bring him nearer to his God? No—worse luck: I'd be casting down his God and

leaving him stripped of everything he cares for and clings to. You know what he'd do—if you have spared a thought from yourself for him."

The man winced.

"I deserve that," he said. "You're right enough. I shall die with this on my conscience. I shall die, and trust Christ to do the rest—for you and him—and even for me."

He left her then, and passed down from the high ground on which they had walked and talked. Her little boy picked whortleberries and filled a can with them not far off. Woodrow was on foot, and now he sank into the valley. She rose and stood perched on the stone crown of a hill—stood with fluttering skirt and lifting bosom, to drink in the great wind that panted overhead from its strife with the Atlantic. Mist swept here and there, and Hilary Woodrow was presently obliterated by grey vapours that drove against the hills, and broke along them, like waves upon a shore.

All that was most precious of this man had already died to Sarah Jane. What remained went ghostly, shadowy as the grey vapour winding at her feet. He had slain himself before her eyes, and she mourned for him, and dumbly wondered at the dreadful change. Was it only the evil-doer who trembled? So did not Dan face his destiny. But Dan's heart and hands were clean. She asked herself what she believed; and she waived the subject as a thing altogether indifferent. Her soul was centred upon her husband and his good. She knew now that she wished Hilary to die. She looked straight and fearless upon her own desire, and did not flinch from it. Death would end his tribulations and bring him peace; and his death must prevent the haunting possibility of the past from ever falling upon her husband's ear.

She went home presently, and was heartened on the way by little Gregory's prattle and happiness. His berries were to make a pudding for dear Aunt Tab, and nobody else was to eat of that pudding.

Presently Tabitha Prout received the gift with immense

gratitude, and promised faithfully that she would make a pudding and eat every bit of it herself. The child grew more and more like his father. He was spoiled by all but Daniel, and his little tyrannies brought merriment to Ruddyford, where life did not stand still.

Brendon without question now took command and stood in his master's stead. What he held good to do was done. The old order changed steadily. Further land had been taken from the wilderness; larger flocks and herds roamed the summer Moor; new cattle-byres rose; success attended the homestead, and content dwelt therein. Prout's work was now as much or little as he cared to make it, and when Woodrow abode at Dawlish, the old man spent a good deal of time there and insisted on being his body-servant. Another labourer had been engaged at the farm, and the rest of the men remained, save Joe Tapson. Him Daniel reluctantly dismissed, since rheumatism in the shoulder had spoiled his usefulness. He left in a bitter mood, and though Brendon found him work, showed hate rather than gratitude. Sarah Jane was still dairymaid; Tabitha still controlled the internal economy of the farm.

Much speculation was rife as to the real relations of Woodrow and Daniel Brendon. Those interested guessed at a bargain, and foresaw that the latter would ere long take over Ruddyford; but the truth none knew, save only John Prout, the Brendons, and Hilary himself.

Prout was indifferent, and troubled little about his own old age. That he trusted to Daniel, as he had trusted it to his master. Indeed, he made no leisure for more than grief. He knew now that Woodrow must presently die, and the fact darkened his days, for he greatly loved him.

As for small Gregory, his attractive behaviour continued to appeal to Mrs. Weekes, who hesitated not to set him up above her own grandchild. The circumstance annoyed her son a good deal; but now had come an addition to Jarratt's family, so interesting, that he expected Hephzibah would forget Brendon's child before the wonder of the new arrivals.

For, succeeding upon some further bad fortune, the man's wife bore twin boys, and the parents and grandparents found themselves uncertain whether to welcome or deplore such a sudden increase of responsibility. Finally the grandparents rejoiced, but the father and mother resented their cheerful and sanguine view, and thought themselves ill-used.

The matter formed subject for a serious debate at the Castle Inn on a Saturday night, and several of those personally interested contributed to the discussion.

"'Tis very well for you to be so gay," said Jarratt to his father, who was much pleased with the twins. "You're like t'other man in the corner there." He pointed to Mr. Churchward. "To hear you two old fools, one would think you'd both been left a legacy. If you're so jolly pleased with 'em, you'd better each take one. You're welcome."

He pulled at his beer gloomily.

"You oughtn't to speak so," answered the miller, Jacob Taverner. "You'd be sorry presently if the Lord took them. Then you'd look back at such bitter words in a very different spirit."

"That I certainly should not. The Lord's welcome to 'em, I assure you. Time was when I wouldn't have minded; but now I do. Everybody knows the sort of luck I've had of late."

"This may be good luck in disguise," returned Taverner. "Who knows but what these infants be born to set you on your legs again? They may have the very cleverness of their grandfather Churchward or their grandmother Weekes."

In a corner Mr. Huggins and Philip Weekes sat together. They were not discussing the twins; but it happened that one of the huckster's fits of depression was upon him, and he hinted at a few personal sorrows to the aged man. Valentine's mind moved slowly, and demanded great length of time to grasp any change. Many months had passed since his friend's illness, yet Mr. Huggins only now began

to appreciate the fact that he was restored to health. He continued to inquire as to Philip's condition.

"'Tis a great blessing to know that you'm fully returned to the use of all your parts, I'm sure. It encourages us old chaps to hear of such recoveries. Do you call yourself perfectly well again yet?"

"Well as ever I was. 'Twasn't doctor, but the missis told me when I'd recovered. One day, without any warning, as I comed in from the fowls for my drop of beef tea, which I'd got rather to rely upon, she said there wasn't none, and she went on to add that I was 'a dare-devil old Gubbins, and would eat us all out of hearth and home, if she'd let me.' So then I knowed I was cured."

"A great female, Phil."

"She is; yet here and there, to say it without any bad meaning, I often wish she wanted more sleep. I'm a hog for sleep—'tis my nature to be so. I like ten hours when I can get it; but she—she don't cry out for more sleep than a bird takes in summer. I've knowed her talk till light scores an' scores of times. And she stops gradual, not sudden. She'll drop remarks, on and on and on—like a bell tolling for death, or a cock crowing. She don't snore, thank God—which shows how one evil be balanced against another, come to think of it."

"The human snore cuts to the ear-drum almost afore any other sound," declared Mr. Huggins. "For my part I can go on through thunder or the elements like a new-born child; but my wife was a great midnight trumpeter. Cotton-wool's a good thing against it."

"What be you going to call your brace o' boys, Weekes, Junior?" asked Mr. Pearn. He had just returned home, and now appeared behind his bar and renewed a subject that was already exhausted.

"Damn my brace of boys," retorted Weekes brutally. "I don't want to hear no more about my brace of boys for the present. Give me a drop of whisky."

Noah Pearn obeyed and laughed.

"Dare say you wish they was a brace of birds instead of boys—then you could eat 'em and have done with them."

"Pearn!" said Mr. Churchward. "I'll thank you to be more careful. A jest is a jest, and I believe I am considered as quick to laugh at a piece of wholesome fun, within the limits of propriety, as any man; but it ill becomes the head of a family, like you, to say such a thing. That is not a gentlemanly joke, but simple coarseness, and you ought to know a great deal better."

"Sorry," answered Mr. Pearn. "I stand corrected."

"Their names are already decided upon," continued the schoolmaster. "Very much to my gratification one tender bud is going to be called 'Adam'—after me, rather than the original father of the human race; and the other will be called 'Jarratt,' after his father. So much is settled. They will each bear a second Christian name, but these have not yet been decided upon. I may mention that I was the only member of the family who was not astonished at this circumstance."

"Why not?" asked Jacob Taverner.

"For the simple reason that the thing has frequently happened before in the Churchward race," answered Adam. "I myself was one of two at a birth, though who would think it?"

"It runs in families—like drink and other disasters,' said Mr. Huggins. "Did your twin die early or late, schoolmaster?"

"Almost immediately. In fact, my dear parents had to have her christened before she was two days old. Otherwise she would have passed away outside the pale of Christianity. I also seemed likely to perish; and they were so hurried that they had no leisure to think out our names. So they called us after our first parents. Poor Eve died soon after the sacred ceremony had been consummated. And I was spared by the inscrutable intelligence of Heaven. Still it was a case of *arcades ambo*, as we say."

CHAPTER VIII

THE LOAN

Dartmoor has been chosen by Nature for a theatre of worship and of work—a hypæthral temple, wherein she ministers before the throne of the sun, nurtures life, ripens her harvest, and buries her uncounted dead. Each year springtime breaks the bud joyfully and lifts the little lark into the blue; each year the summer builds and the autumn gleans; each year, when the sun's lamp is lowered, when the curtain of cloud is drawn, sleep and death pass by together along the winter silences. Thus the punctual rite and round are accomplished century after century, and, at each year's end, arise immemorial threnodies of many waters and fierce winds. Rivers roar a requiem; and their inevitable dirge is neither joyful nor mournful, but only glorious. The singers also are mortal; the wind and the wave are creatures, even as the perishing heath, crumbling stone, and falling foliage; they too rise and set, triumph and expire; they too are a part of the only miracle of the universe: the miracle of matter made manifest in pomp and wonder, in beauty and mystery, where Nature rolls her endless frieze along the entablature of Time.

Beneath December sunlight Dartmoor stretched in sleep—a sleep that lay hidden under death. Rack and ruin of many fair things were scattered upon the bosom of the wilderness, and all pursued their appointed way to dissolution. The conventional idea of man's mind was reversed, as usual, by this wide natural process; for death lay exposed league upon league under the operation of air and light, frost, and water; while life was buried and invisibly received back its proper payment for the year's work accomplished. But mortality so exhibited revealed nothing unseemly or sad, for much beauty belonged to it. The land rose stark to

its tors, and the shattered summits of the range rolling south-west from Great Links, towered dark against the low slant of the winter sun. Some fleeting mist, like a vapour of silver, swept around the highest turrets and shone very dazzling by contrast with the gloomy northern faces of the hills; while far below, huddled, as it were, beneath the reach of the horizontal light, there hung a leaden and visible heaviness of air. On the shoulders of the Moor drowsed pallid sunshine, but little warmth was yielded thereby. Dartmoor soaked up this illumination like a sponge, and did not waken at its tepid touch. The wilderness slept at noon; and in its sleep it frowned. Over all spread the mighty, mottled patchwork of the hour—the immeasurable, ancient, outworn habit flung down by Nature when she disrobed for sleep. The summer green had vanished, the autumn fire was cold; where heath had wakened into amethyst, swart patches and tracts of darkness now scattered upon the livid pelt of dead grass, like the ebony pattern on the coat of a leopard. But while the ling was sad-coloured and sombre, the heather had taken a cheerful green. Under humid sunshine this huge design was apparent; then the west darkened and the pale gold of the sky became blurred by veils of rain. They swept up slowly and cast gloom over the light. The Moor colours all changed beneath their shadow and ran together. Only within stone's-throw from a man's eyes might detail and distinction still be marked. There persisted the shades and half shades of the dead, grey bloom-bells of the ling; there shone manifold minute, bright vegetation on scattered boulders; and there the wet brake-fern, that scattered these slopes with fallen filigree of deepest auburn, uttered its last expression of beauty.

Caught in the heavy rain, a man who walked upon the side of Great Links ran for the summit, and dived into a familiar cavern, where rocks fell together and made shelter. To his surprise the first wayfarer found a second already taking refuge against this sudden storm; and thus met Jarratt Weekes and Daniel Brendon on a day near Christmas.

This accident inspired the elder man. He had long contemplated certain propositions with regard to Daniel, and now opportunity was thrust upon him and he prepared to take advantage of it.

They tendered friendly welcomes, asked each for the other's good news, and together deplored the weather. There had been a wet, cold summer that denied the prophecy of spring, and many a moorman faced the approaching season with fear.

"Rain—rain—rain—curse the rain!" said Weekes. "Rain driving deep enough to drown the dead in their graves."

"There's not much to be said for this autumn's work, truly. We must hope for a good year coming. We shan't have such another for certain. Not that it matters so much to us, since we depend on beasts."

"'Twill mean buying a lot of hay, surely?"

"Not for us. We had a bit of luck. I saved a fortnight before my neighbours, and catched a spell of dry weather. They laughed to see me cutting so early. 'Let 'em laugh,' said Prout. 'They laugh best who laugh last.' And so it fell out."

"Most of the Lydford hay was ruined."

"And the corn on top. 'Twas beaten down, just too late for it to get up again. There'll be trouble this winter, I'm much afeared."

"There is trouble—everywhere already. And for my part I haven't got to look further than my own roof to find it."

"Very sorry to hear you say so, I'm sure. What was the end of that mine business? Somebody said they was going to try again; but that's to fling good money after bad, I should judge."

"Damn the mine: I've done with it anyhow. My wife had a hundred pound from her father when she came to me; and now 'tis gone in that swindle, along with another hundred of my own."

BENEATH GREAT LINKS.

[*To face p.* 286.

"They'm tricky things to put money in. I wonder you risked it."

"There wasn't no risk on paper. Their figures would have convinced any man. But they lied, and did it under the law, so that they be safe. I'm in a very tight place indeed, to be frank with you. I've got a few stiff bills to meet this quarter, and there's only two ways of doing it now. One is to sell out of a little investment or two that is paying well; and that's a cruel thing to do for a man with a wife and an expensive family. And t'other is to find a friend that'll prove a real friend, and raise a bit of money to tide over till spring."

"You ought to be able to do it."

"I can, no doubt; but I'm proud. 'Tisn't everybody I'd go to—even for a trifle like a hundred pound. I've got to show security, and nobody likes opening out their private affairs to other men. I'd thought about it, however, for it must be done. And it may astonish you to hear I'd nearly settled who I was going to."

Brendon nodded.

"You'll have no difficulty," he repeated.

"That's for you to say; for 'tis you I intended to ask."

"Me!"

"Why not? We all know you're a snug man nowadays. You ban't bringing Ruddyford into the front rank of Dartymoor farms for nothing. You're not doing all those big things down there, and taking in land, and doubling your sheep, and buying pedigree cattle and all the rest of it, for nothing. You're putting hundreds into Woodrow's pocket; and, as a sane man, I suppose you look to it that a bit sticks in your own."

"That's right enough, though it's the future rather than the present I think for."

"So we all do. It's the future that's troubling me. I've got a policy of life insurance to be paid next week, and it's got to be paid. The only question is how. There's that and fifty pounds for other things, besides ten I owe my

mother. So the long and short is I want a hundred, and I shall be a good bit obliged to you if you'll lend it to me for six months."

Brendon did not answer immediately. Then he spoke.

"If ten or even fifteen—I've done a little this year, to tell you privately. I've helped my married sister to Plymouth, whose husband is very much under the weather, and I've gived Joe Tapson a trifle too. He's left us. I had to make a change. Then there's the monument to Mr. Friend. Altogether you've asked at a very awkward moment."

Jarratt sneered.

"It's always an awkward moment when a man asks a fellow-man to do him a kindness. And them as talk about the decent things they do—you'll find they don't do many as a rule. Ban't a habit, else they'd not think 'em worth naming."

Daniel's face hardened.

"Why d'you say that? Can't you see I had to give you a reason for refusing? And don't you know me well enough to know that I'd give the true reason or none? 'Twas out of consideration for your feelings I said so much. Ban't pleasant to beg, and ban't pleasant to refuse."

"I'm not begging. And you should not use the word. I'm wanting to raise a loan at proper interest—four per cent., if you like. That's not begging. That's offering anybody with any sense a good investment for money."

"I shouldn't want no interest at all. I'm in your debt to the extent of losing my temper and striking you years ago, and I've not forgot it; and I'd be glad to do you a service. I've always looked out for the chance."

"You needn't mention that. I remember very well. There's a white mark across the bridge of my nose, Brendon, that reminds me of what you did every time I look in the glass, and always will."

"You'll forget it before I do. But I can't lend you a hundred, nor yet fifty. I'll lend you—twenty the day after to-morrow. That's the very best I can offer."

"Useless. I want a hundred."

"Then I'm sorry, but I can't find it."

Weekes reflected. He was in a position considerably more straitened than he had confessed to Brendon. He had overreached himself from cupidity, and now stood in debt to several people, including his lawyer. In this last quarter Jarratt's relations were strained, and the man of business refused to wait longer. A natural darkness of disposition had increased as a result of these troubles. He had quarrelled with his mother, with his wife, and with his wife's father. He had lost his self-respect somewhat, and as that lessened he grew the riper for mischief. Now he became a little hot, and permitted himself to remember the secret past. At Brendon's refusal, events long gone by rose up in the other's mind, and he spoke.

"Better think twice. You never know who you are helping. This hundred, even if it pinched you a thought for the moment, might be a very good investment, though you don't get interest for it."

Brendon stared at him.

"Come out," he said. "The rain's done. Perhaps I shall understand a speech like that better in the open. And yet—how? To my ear that sounds a bit curious. Perhaps you'll explain it."

"No, I shan't—though I might, I dare say. 'Tis for you to decide. I want to be friends."

"Why not, I should like to know?"

"No reason at all—if you'll lend me the money."

"And I tell you I can't."

"You mean that you won't."

"Take it as you please, if you're such a fool."

"No fool me—not by long chalks. Perhaps the boot's on the other leg. Not that I threaten anything."

"'Threaten'! Good God A'mighty—who be you to threaten? Best be off—or I'll threaten—and do more than threaten!"

"Strange, such a trumpet of the Lord as you are, that

you never can keep your temper five minutes together with me. And yet I'm civil enough. Your education's to blame, I suppose. Well, I only ask you if you'll lend me a hundred pounds, and I only say you won't regret it if you do; but may possibly regret it if you don't. That's all."

"If I could, I wouldn't—not now. You have said that I shall regret it if I don't. And I say 'Explain that, if you want to remain my friend.'"

"I certainly shan't explain that. Only remember that those who think they stand, had sometimes better be careful lest they fall. And, as to friendship, I'm quite indifferent. If you refuse this loan you're not my friend, of course. Friendship is as friendship does. This is my way. I'll wish you good-bye and a good investment for your savings."

"Better talk this out," said Brendon; but Jarratt Weekes was already on his way. He did not answer, and did not look back. Instead, he twirled his stick, whistled, and assumed a cheerful and careless air as he departed.

Brendon stood still a long time, in some concern at this unexpected incident. He puzzled himself to know what it might mean, retraced the course of his relations with Weekes during the last few years, and could see no light. It struck him that Sarah Jane might be able to find some explanation. Animosity clearly lurked in the man's temper; but on what foundation it rested Daniel could not imagine. The threat he dismissed without thought, as a futile utterance of disappointment.

CHAPTER IX

THE MEMORY OF MR. HUGGINS

On a day after noon in late January the hand of winter was upon Lydford, and the wet roads ran shining into the village. Utmost sobriety, with a scant splash of colour here and there, marked the time. The hedges were iron-grey, yet they flamed now and again where a copper glow of foliage still clung to some pollarded beech. The great castle scowled down from its blind windows, rain fell drearily; all round about was mire and gloom and low mists, that crept along hill and over fallow. In the meadow-lands grass seemed trodden into mud; the very streets repined, and no life was revealed save where fowls sat in the boughs of a laurel and resigned themselves to sleep and forgetfulness, and where a lonely dog trotted along the main thoroughfare. In an open doorway of a carpenter's shop two men planed coffin planks; and further on came clink of chisel and mallet from a shed where a stonemason was hammering at a granite cross. The only human life visible seemed occupied with death. Each wayside garden was a litter of ragged stalk and stem that cried to be hidden; but the little golden yew, beside the home of Philip Weekes, shone like a candle across the waning day, and rose sprightly and cheerful in the languor and depression of the hour.

Aloft a winged people did not share Lydford's gloom. Starlings much frequented the village at this season, and towards nightfall assembled in many thousands together, where certain elms stood beside the castle. Here, in a living stream, they flowed up from hedgerows and fields, until the naked boughs were black with them. They forced the sense of their presence upon the most abstracted spirit, and raised a merry din that was audible a mile distant. This life dominated dusk until one felt a sojourner in the abode of

birds rather than any home of men. If a door slammed or a man shouted, the myriads would simultaneously take wing and launch like a black cloud into the air. Then, uttering a sound as of many waters, they whirled and warped, gyrated, turned, and with a gradual hush of diminishing noise regained their perches, folded their feathers, and resumed their shouting. Only with night did they depart into darkness and silence. Then, one by one, the windows twinkled with fire, and there came a wakening moment when men returned from their labour and the street echoed to slow, splashing boots and human voices lifted in many moods. Children cried to each other and hastened home from school; women, indicated in the dark by the white oblongs of their aprons, flitted between the cottage doors and the shops; suddenly came barking of dogs and a pitter-patter of five hundred little hoofs, where a flock of sheep passed through the village to an open gate beyond. As they went, a fan of light from the post-office window found their fleeces and flashed upon them during their brief transit from darkness back into darkness again.

Behind the sheep came Joe Tapson, and beside him walked Jarratt Weekes. They were discussing Brendon, and the widower talked, while the other listened to him.

"Turned me off, like a worn-out dog, for no reason on God's earth except I was losing my nature and getting old! May the time come when the same happens to him; may I live to see him begging his bread—that's what I pray; and me, now I'm up in years, brought down to do a common drover's work and thankful for a roof to cover me."

"Wanted a younger and spryer man, I suppose," said Jarratt indifferently. "Don't see you've got much call to grumble. 'Tis the curse of all men who have to trust to their bodies for a living and not their brains, that a time comes when they be worn out. I heard from Sarah Jane that Daniel was sorry to be rid of you, only he couldn't help it in justice to the farm. She told me Mr. Woodrow gave you five pounds when you left."

"What's that? 'Tis nothing against the cruelty of flinging me off. They don't fling Prout off, though he's far more useless than me. They don't sack that sour-faced, sour-minded bag of bones, Tabitha."

"They are old servants—retainers. 'Tis quite a different matter. Here's my way. I hope you'll get a fixed job soon. But I can't help you; my luck's out too, and I'm a long way worse off than you for the minute. You've got only your own carcase to think of; I've got a wife and children."

Tapson departed behind the sheep, and Jarratt Weekes dropped in upon his mother. He found her out, but Sarah Jane had also come to see Hephzibah. She was talking to Philip when the huckster's son arrived.

"Can't wait no more, Mr. Weekes. Tell your wife—why, here's Jarratt! Where's your mother got to, Jar?"

"I want her myself," he said. "Down there chattering to the people at Little Lydford, I suppose, and setting the world right in general, no doubt."

"I can't wait no longer, else Daniel will fear for me. 'Twas only about the butter. How be you faring, and how's Mary? Haven't seen her this longful time."

"She thought you'd forgot her, like one or two more of late."

"You say that. Mary never did. She knows me a long sight better than that."

"I'll see you part of your road," said Jarratt. "I want to speak to you; and you want to speak to me."

He referred to a previous conversation.

Sarah Jane nodded, bade Mr. Weekes good-bye, and went out with Jarratt.

"What did he say? But I know. You'd have let me hear before now if the man had any wish to befriend me. Did you ask for Mary's sake? That was the only chance I know."

"I did. I said how she'd been troubled beyond reason of late, and that the money would go far to lessen her load. I

asked more than once for her, and he was sorry he couldn't do it. You know him. He doesn't make excuses or anything like that. He just said that if he could have done it, he would have, and gladly. But it's out of his power, so there's an end. Won't anybody else oblige you? Wouldn't Mr. Churchward?"

"He can't. He's got that great, slack, good-for-nought William on his hands again. How he endures the worthless rascal beats me; but so it is. A pity your husband don't see his way—a very great pity indeed."

"I feel the same, I'm sure. I wish there was anything I could do for Mary. Would it rest her if I was to take your eldest boy home along with me for a bit?"

He shook his head.

"No, no; 'tisn't little things like that; 'tis the big thing of having to find three figures and lose money on it. I know right well Brendon could do it. And I'll tell you more than that: he's making a mistake not to."

"'Tis out of his power, I tell you."

"I know better."

"You oughtn't to speak so."

"Oughtn't I? Well, we all do what we oughtn't sometimes—even you and Daniel. Tell him this: that I want the money badly and I make it a very special favour, and I shall be greatly obliged to him, for all our sakes, if he'll manage to find it for me by Ladyday next. Tell him that. And use what influence you've got, Sarah Jane. You know what I felt for you once—well, I'm fond enough of you still—much too fond to bring any trouble on you if I can prevent it. So try with all your might to get Dan to see sense."

He left her no time to answer, but turned away abruptly. She stood still a moment, then, in deep astonishment went on her way; and presently told Daniel of the matter.

"He's desperate seemingly," said her husband. "Even so he talked to me, but dared not go quite so far as he did to you. Threats be the weapons of weak men. He was always fond of talking rather large. Even so Joe Tapson

spoke when he had to go. The good I did him was not remembered. He cared nothing for that. As for Weekes, I can't help him, and there's an end of it."

Brendon dismissed the subject from his mind and bade Sarah Jane do the like. He went on his way, and life with its thousand calls soon made him forget the tribulations of Jarratt Weekes. His wife, however, did not overlook them, because, when possible, she visited Mary and heard of the increasing difficulties of her husband.

And Jarratt himself allowed embarrassment to breed ferocity, as happens often with small-minded men. When he left Sarah Jane after uttering his threat, he returned to Lydford and went to drink at the Castle Inn. Full well he knew that Daniel Brendon was not to be moved, and he dared not approach him directly for fear of actual injury to himself. But he had reached striking point; out of his own vexed and troubled heart rose a fierce longing to bring vexation and trouble upon others. He scarcely realized the terrific gravity of any attack on Brendon at this juncture, for the years had dulled his memory, and only one main fact respecting Daniel's wife stuck there. Given prosperity and sustained success, he might never have struck; but now a time had come when misfortune played the lodestone and drew from him an active and avid malignity. He smarted to see the other rise from strength to strength. He did not perceive that even rumours of the truth would bring absolute and utter ruination, or he might have hesitated. All he designed as yet was a drop of gall for Brendon's full cup of sweetness. He thought how to embitter; but he did not desire to poison. He failed, as many a coarse-minded soul fails, to perceive that what for him might be no more than affliction and transitory torment, to a greater spirit must mean everlasting wreck and perdition.

With a mind quite empty he entered the inn, ordered his drink and waited to catch the thread of the conversation before taking his part in it. Taverner was there, and old Huggins. The latter talked, and half-a-dozen men in the bar listened

to him. Noah Pearn served his customer with liquor and explained the subject.

"Valentine here be running on the past to-day, and he's gone back fifty years in his memory as easy as we go back a month. He often will after a third glass. 'Tis a pity there's none to write down the things he calls home; for they'll all perish with him, and some of 'em be very well worth remembering."

He stopped, and they listened to the ancient.

"Them days of barley bread! But which among you folk ever tasted it? Harsh it was and made us far shorter and sharper than we be nowadays. I've seed a chap buried at cross-roads with a stake drove through his carcase. 'Twas thought he'd killed hisself, and cross-roads was the grave of such people then. By night they buried him; and by night they dug him up again."

"Dug him up, Val!" cried Mr. Pearn. "Surely not. What for did they dig him up again?"

"Because a year later 'twas found that he'd died by lawful murder and never took his life at all! A valiant man, as stopped coaches on the Launceston Road, was catched red-handed, and tried to Exeter, and hanged 'pon Gibbet Hill above Mary Tavy. The last hanging there 'twas —somewhere about the year 1790, I reckon, or may have been later. But I went to see the sight, as a small boy, and afore they turned the bold feller off, he confessed that among other wicked things, he'd put a bullet through the chap we buried, because the chap had seed him stop a coach and marked him. And he'd left a old hoss-pistol by the chap a purpose to make it look as if he'd done it hisself. So they dug him up again and gived his fragments a proper box, and laid him in holy ground, and parson made a whole-hearted speech about it, and forgived everybody, as he hoped to be forgiven."

"The things you've seen!" murmured a young man.

"True for you—few living have seen the like. Ripe old customs, as be gone past recalling. And religion at the

back of all we did and thought in them days. Even wassailing the apple-trees be dying out, and charms, and all them high ways we had of reproving lightness and sin, and punishing evil-doers afore the nation. I never seed a human creature whipped at the cart-tail myself, and I'm glad I didn't, for that's a very horrid idea, though 'twas often well enough deserved; but other things I have seen, when the evil-doer has been catched out in his sins and held up in the sight of all men. 'Twas a sign, no doubt, that men were rising in knowledge and understanding when we punished their minds instead of their backs, and made them a sign and a byword without putting a hand upon 'em."

Mr. Huggins paused, quite weary. He had been talking a long time, and before Weekes arrived he had sung an old song to an old tune.

"Wonnerful form he's in," whispered Taverner. "I hope it ban't the last flicker of the candle, and we shall hear presently the cold have took him off. He'd be quite a loss in company."

Weekes nodded. Certain words let drop by the venerable chronicler had fallen upon the hungry soil of his mind and taken root there. Now he desired further speech with Valentine, and presently offered him an arm upon his way.

"I must get you to sing that song to me," he said. "You'm a wonderful old man, Val. To think that you can sing and mind a tune and the words and everything, and you up eighty-three or more."

"'Tis so. Not a note out of place, I believe, though the high ones roll up into my head and miscarry somewhat. Still there 'tis: I've got it; and a many others I've got as was thought pretty singing in my young manhood, but wouldn't be vitty now. The times be altered, and if I singed a thing or two I know right well, you'd think I was a very coarse-minded old chap. Ideas have changed."

"Yes; but human nature hasn't. Did you punish frail folk then? There was skimmitty riding, wasn't there?"

"Certainly there was; and a thing oftener done, because

dreadfuller and more solemn-like, was burying. 'Twas a very heart-shaking affair, and the manner of it was this. Suppose a man and woman did wrong, owing to the power of nature upon them, or the husband being away from home, or some other natural cause, then, if 'twas found out against 'em, the people rose up and acted a funeral. Everything was done decently and in order. But you had to do it on private land, else 'twas an unlawful assembling, like a prize-fight or a cock-fight, and might get you into trouble. When the land was chosen, skilled hands made two puppets as much like the parties as their craft could; and they was dressed in grave-clothes, or else common clothes, and put in coffins. Then some man who was up to it, read the service, and the dolls were nailed home into their boxes, and buried underground with all the dignity of real dead people. The service was read, and if a chap had a clever tongue, he'd preach a bit and lash the erring victims all he could. I've knowed cases when a man faced it out and laughed at his own burying, and stood beer to the mourners; and I've known cases when the parties was saved by it, and turned to the Almighty, and was forgiven by all men; and I've known cases where the burial was a mistake and the man and woman were both quite innocent. A choir and undertaker and all, mind you. And, besides such things as that, I've seen witches ducked, and scolds bridled—in fact, 'twould puzzle me to tell you what I haven't seen in my time."

Jarratt, however, kept him to the former matter, and won various other details of the old ceremony before he bade Valentine farewell. His mind was stored with a fantastic medley of ideas and possibilities when he returned to his home; and on the following evening he re-visited Mr. Huggins and learnt more concerning the subject that now so largely interested him.

CHAPTER X

FAREWELL

At the turn of winter John Prout went down to Dawlish, and did not come back. He sent a gloomy letter to Brendon, and explained that their master desired him to remain.

"He's come down to a shadow of himself," wrote John, "and the doctor told me yesterday, when I asked him how things were going with Mr. Hilary, that he'd taken a bad turn of late, and might not weather another year. He coughs something cruel; but he's wonderful cheerful since he comed to believe the old things. A clergyman often sits along with him by the hour and does him good seemingly. I be a large comfort to him, I do think, so I can't leave him no more, unless he takes a turn for the good. He wants to see you all again, and if he doesn't come back, you and Sarah Jane and Tabitha will have to come and see him, for he's set upon that. Never a man faced death braver. Now he thinks like he does, he'll be glad to go, I do believe. But he hasn't lost touch of Ruddyford, as you'll see by the rest of my letter."

There followed a string of directions from Woodrow to Brendon. Some Daniel approved, some he disapproved; but all were very carefully executed. He read Prout's letter to the farm, and wide sorrow and concern greeted it. The women mourned and openly wept together; Daniel went for days silent and abstracted. He spoke to none but his wife. Then Agg and Peter Lethbridge, reduced to considerable doubt concerning their own future, ventured to question Brendon. They explained their uncertainties and he set them at rest.

"What will happen when Mr. Woodrow goes is already determined," he said. "I can't tell you what it is till the

time comes; but this I'll say: I can promise you both to bide here on your present money as long as you please me."

At Dawlish, Prout waited upon his fading master, nursed him like a woman, and added to his comfort in every way possible. To please John, Woodrow sent for a consulting physician from Exeter; but the man could give no hope.

Now Hilary had ceased to ride, though he let Prout drive him when the days were fair. Together they went in a little pony-carriage round about the fir-fledged hills of Haldon; and it was given to Hilary once more to see the first glory of spring larches, once more to look into the eyes of the violet and note the little sorrel shake forth her fleeting loveliness. Great peace of mind had now descended upon him, and with reduced activities an interest in the lesser things of nature awakened, and he loved to pluck the flowers, as a child plucks them, yet with the understanding of a man. The smell of the spring earth was good to him. He feared not at all to sink therein and return to Nature the dust that she had lent him. In his heart there reigned sure consciousness that this was not the end; that a higher, fuller life opened beyond the earthly portals; that the prelude and not the play was done when the clod fell and a man's coffin-lid vanished for ever.

To Prout he imparted these opinions, and John, who doubted not of eternity, rejoiced to see the strength and peace that henceforth marked his master's mind.

"How you could bear with me, John! Often, looking back, I marvel at the patience of you and of Brendon. You had all that I lacked; yet you listened to my trash and never did you rise and denounce me for a fool!"

"Not likely. Whatever you was, you wasn't that."

"I did things then, and thought them not wrong that I know now were wicked."

"Thank God for it that you know, master."

"But is it too late, John?"

"Never too late. Never too late."

"I must leave mercy to my wronged Maker. 'Tis well

to be a free-thinker in a way—just as 'tis well for a country bred man to go to cities. You don't know what the country really means till you've been mewed up in the town; and you don't know what faith means till you've tried to live without it. So I feel. No freedom of thought will think right into wrong, John Prout."

"God's above all."

"Once I thought, with a wise man who lived before Christ came, that what we men call life is only a poor shadow dragging a corpse, like a prisoner drags his chain. Now I know better. Now the things that seemed good suffer an eclipse, and the things that seemed beautiful stand out in their naked, ugly truth. They were all a mirage—all shadows in a desert of sand. I thought that they quenched thirst and satisfied hunger. That was part of the great blindness, John. Now I know that the sun-dance and glare and dazzle was all a wicked sham. I wove them for myself; I blinded myself; I deluded myself. If I could tell you how base I'd been—what things I did, believing them to be reasonable and not wrong. The folly—the madness! I said to myself, 'Nature does neither right nor wrong; it is only the foolish man who calls her cruel or kind. She rises above these human ideas. And so will I.' Yes, I thought to copy Nature and follow the thing she prompted. I dinned into my own ears that what I did was far above right or wrong. I said to myself, 'Let the fools who like words call their actions "good" or "evil." Do you, for your part, look to it that your actions are "reasonable," and so content your conscience that demands only reason.' What a light has burned in on all that preposterous nonsense since! Crimes—crimes I have committed in the name of nature and reason. O God, Prout, when I think—— And now I know that it will take a forgiving Saviour to save me. Well may Christ have taught us that God is a merciful God! I should go mad if I did not grasp that unutterable truth, John. To His mercy I trust myself—and not only myself."

He prattled on of the dogmas he had now accepted, and behind every thought and pious hope John Prout saw Sarah Jane. Often the sick man spoke directly of her; more often, when declaring his new convictions he used no names; but Prout—from his inner knowledge—perceived which way his master's mind was tending. He gathered that Hilary hoped Sarah Jane would presently come to see with her husband's eyes and abandon a certain large enthusiasm for her own kind in favour of a narrower trust and confidence in the tenets of Christianity alone. Once or twice Prout believed that the other was actually going to confess his action of the past; but Hilary never did so. He told his old servant that the farm had been left to Brendon, but he gave no reason for the step. He was, however, quick enough to be astonished at John's lack of surprise.

"Did he tell you? Did you know it, that you take it so calmly?" he asked.

"To be frank, I did know it," answered John. "Don't blame her. You understand women better'n me; and you'll guess how hard 'twas for her to keep it in. 'Twas a night five year ago and more, when chance throwed us together at Lydford, and she helped me home against a storm. By the same token a rainbow showed over against the moon. Of course I never spoke of it again; more did she."

"You don't blame me?"

"Who be I to blame you? No man on earth have ever had a better master than what you have been to me."

"And no man ever loved a man better than you have loved me, John. Well I know it."

So oftentimes they talked, and when Hilary was unequal to speech he made Prout read to him and rehearse those things that he best liked to hear repeated.

Sometimes, however, the sick man cared for no company other than his thoughts; and then he would bid John depart, and for hours together brood upon the past and survey his vanished deeds in the light of present belief. A

fading memory served to dim their details, and what was left faith much distorted. He remembered the glow and glory of the first kiss, and loathed that damnable contact as the beginning of the master-sin of his days; he beheld himself imparadised in those lovely arms; and he shuddered and saw all hell watching with hungry eyes.

Woodrow knew that he would not return to Ruddyford. He had planned to die there; but now he was indifferent, and already pictured his own mound under the shadow of the old church at Dawlish. He was desirous, however, to take leave of his few friends, and invited Prout to plan their visits in such a way that they should not know these meetings must be the last.

Miss Prout first came and spent three days. With her she brought little dishes made with her own hands; and while she remained at Dawlish she spent most of her time in the kitchen, to the concern of the landlady, who resented Tabitha. Hilary cared not much for Prout's sister, and bade her good-bye indifferently. She returned home with a black story of his decline, and foretold that he must soon pass. Next Daniel went down, but the time was full of work, and he stayed a very short while. To speak became increasingly difficult for Woodrow; yet he liked to listen to Daniel, and came to him in some respects as a learner. He invited Brendon to preach to him, and the earnestness and conviction of the big man impressed him. Old instincts awoke to the challenge at these dogmatic utterances, but the sufferer smothered them. He believed them no more than a mere mechanical process of the brain—a reflex action persisting after the death of the habit of thought that was responsible for it. He made himself believe all that Brendon did. And, last of all, he believed in hell, because Christ did.

Hilary was frank with Daniel, and did not hide his approaching end.

"I shall hope to see you once more," he said. "And that will be the last time. I should much wish you to be

with me when I die, if that is not a selfish wish. Would you mind?"

"No. I want to be with you then. Do you like the minister here? Is he the right man for you?"

"I value him very much. A gentle, hopeful man."

"Be sure I'll come."

"And I must see Sarah Jane too. Don't tell her that it will be the last time, because that would be a great grief to her, for she's fond of me, I know."

"Yes, she is."

"Let her come next week for a day or two, if you can spare her. But I'll not tell her that it's the last 'good-bye.' All the same, I'm afraid she'll guess it for herself."

"Try to do her good—same as you have me," said Brendon. "You won't speak many more words on human ears now. Let 'em be as the Lord wills. He'll put it into your heart what to say to her. A better, nobler woman than my wife never lived. Fearless and brave and high-minded—I never saw the like of her and never shall. But all the same, from the first—from our courting—there was always something I couldn't understand. Her point of view—not all pure godliness; yet I'd not dare to say she was ungodly in anything. But a sort of high habit of mind that wouldn't bend to the yoke. Always hated and still hates to call herself a miserable sinner afore the footstool of Grace. Yet humble, and gentle, and true to my heart and my hopes here and hereafter, as the moss is true to the stone."

"No man was ever worthy of her, Daniel."

"I know it. Tell her the meek are blessed and inherit the earth."

"And blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. I've never known but one woman that I could think of as able to look at God, Daniel, and that's your wife. Don't ask me to dare to teach her—'tis for her to teach me; and teach you too. Why should she be fearful? She

can't be. Perfect love casteth out fear. That's her lesson to us."

Brendon considered doubtfully.

"You may be right," he said. "All the same——"

And when the future owner of Ruddyford returned home, his wife made ready. She knew full well without words that this was her last visit to Hilary Woodrow; and she braced her mind for the ordeal and all that it must mean. She had long since ceased to fear that he would speak, and when Sarah Jane and Hilary met for the last time it was not necessary for him to inform her that their secret perished with themselves.

"Leave it to be told in the next world, if it is right that it should be told," he said to her. "Sometimes I think it may be a part of my purgation and proper punishment, in some place of learning and cleansing, that I may yet have to confess this terrible sin before my fellow spirits—even to the spirit of Daniel himself, when his turn comes. That seems justice, Sarah Jane, as man pictures justice in his feeble ignorance. But at any rate I'm convinced, so far as this life goes, that the proper course is silence. We've no right to wreck lives by imparting our knowledge to them, if that knowledge can only bring ceaseless suffering along with it. I've confessed my sin to God a thousand times. But I know that both punishment and absolution belong to the world to come, not to this."

"Like a schoolboy called up afore his master—to learn the best or worst," she said.

"Even like that. Nothing's settled down here; nothing is finished down here. Everything has to wait till the light touches it."

"And even good and evil ban't understood down here. Maybe you'll find in that light you won't cut such a poor figure after all. Ban't your many great, good, generous deeds and kindly thoughts to count? Ban't your last years

to count? Be it a small thing that you've fought your way to your God through all that thicket of books?"

"Not a small thing for myself, certainly. All the difference between heaven and hell, Sarah Jane."

"Oh, don't let that last word come on your lips, for God's sake," she begged. "I do hate it, like I hate a snake. Sometimes, for all I'm so glad that you are happy and have got God, I can find it in me to wish you was the same as you used to be without Him. You was a deal braver, when you laughed at hell, than you be now. And I'll laugh at hell for ever and ever—laugh at it still, even if I was to find myself in it."

"Think of me as I am, Sarah Jane, and believe what I say now. Don't remember me as I was, or call back the vile things I uttered then. Do you remember that once I said God was only the shadow of man's self reflected against the background of his own self-consciousness? I thought that a very fine idea when I made it up. Now I know 'twas the Devil that prompted it."

"I reckoned nobody believed in God and hell both—except my own dear Daniel. And now he's got you to think the same. But I hoped 'twould be t'other way round, and you'd make him flout it."

"Christ believed in it."

"An' quenched it for ever, didn't He? So some seem to think, anyhow. Mr. Matherson be shaky about it, I'm sure, for Dan's very unsettled with the Luke Gospellers along of that very thing. He's going to leave 'em. 'Tis a great grief to him to go, but he says that Mr. Matherson's in danger, and that much larning have made him mad here and there. Did you ever hear tell of the Salvation Army?"

"Yes. It's a new thing, but it's growing fast, and my clergyman believes that in time to come it may be a great power for good in the world."

"Dan's very much took by it; but Mr. Matherson be doubtful. My husband's like to join 'em, I believe. He

says they work on Bible bed-rock, and seem to him to follow closer on the actual words of the Lord than any of the regulars."

"If 'tis a good thing, God will surely bless it, Sarah Jane."

"'Tis all one to me, so long as Daniel is content."

They made pretence that this was not the last meeting, and that Sarah Jane should come down again in the summer and bring her child. But death was written on the man's face now, and she knew how soon the end must come. The religious atmosphere, with which he surrounded himself, stifled her worse than the physical odours of a sick chamber. When the clergyman came, she was glad to rush away for a time and walk by the sea.

Hilary rarely rose before noon; but on the day that she was to return home he partially dressed and went into a sitting-room. It faced south, and the train, which was to take her away, would pass along in sight of it.

Their actual parting was brief. Prout left them alone and waited outside.

"Good-bye—you—you—the best and bravest of living things that I have ever seen," he said.

"Good-bye, dear Hilary. We shall meet again—somewhere."

"I know it—thank my God I know it."

She went close to him and looked into his haggard face. Then she kissed him.

"I'll wave my handkercher as the train passes."

"And I'll wave mine, Sarah Jane."

Presently, when the train steamed along between Hilary Woodrow and the sea, though Prout waved from the window and Woodrow stood behind him and strained to catch his last glimpse of her, they only marked her hand held out, and the dance of her handkerchief fluttering. She saw nothing, for the blue of her April eyes was dimmed and drowned.

CHAPTER XI

THE DOLLS

"JAR," said Mrs. Weekes, "you be getting on home to fifty years old, and since I first slapped your breech, when you'd been in the world a matter of six months, you and me have never had no grave difference of opinion."

"What then?" asked the man.

Sarah Jane was spending a soft May evening at the cottage of Mary; but, not desiring to be in her presence, Jarratt left them and went to see his mother. For some time Hephzibah had expressed a desire for private conversation with him, and now Jarratt gave her the opportunity. But quickly he regretted it. Rumour had reached his mother's ears, and she felt very agitated to learn that some strange and most unusual event was pending. Only whispers and hints had reached her, and since such shadowy insinuations were specially offensive to her mind, she commanded her son before her and ordered him to be plain.

"What then?" repeated Jarratt.

"Then 'twould be an everlasting shame and misfortune if we fell out now—you in your prime and me with my white hair and coming to the end of my days. You've never hid much from me that I know of, and nothing that I didn't find out if I wanted to. So don't try now. There's all manner of beastly whisperings in the air; and you be in them. Wherever I go to have a talk, people say, 'What's this here thing Mr. Jarratt be up to?' And when I tell 'em I don't know, they shut their mouths and change the subject."

"So much the better. It don't concern you, anyway."

"You can say that! But it do concern me, and I will know the truth of it. From all I hear it concerns everybody

called Weekes; for the credit of a family be of some account, though 'tis only a family of dormice, like your father's family. I was born a Mudge; and that's a lasting blessing to me; and you've got my blood in you and ban't going to demean it, I should hope."

"If old Huggins have been talking—or William Churchward either, I'll wring their necks!"

"Jar," answered his mother. "'Tis an old saying, and true as old, that Satan finds mischief for idle hands. Hard luck you've had of late, and to my cost I know it; but because you've been forced to wait and use patience, and haven't had the usual chances to be busy, that ban't no reason why for you should use your time ill. Guy Fawkes and angels! Isn't the world full of chances to do right? Better bide home and nurse the babbies than go out to do other folks a wrong turn."

"When I'm hit, I hit back."

"I don't know nothing about the parties, and don't want to know. If a man's hurt you, hit him back from the shoulder so hard as you know how. But this—this thing I hear. Even if 'tis true, and some poor unhappy girl have made a slip—good God Almighty!—you ban't a coward to lift your hand to a woman, be you?"

"What d'you know, and what don't you know?" he asked.

"I don't know no names, and 'twasn't Val, nor yet Adam Churchward's son who told me that you'd got a plot afoot. Philip Weekes it was who heard it—your own father; and very properly he put the thing afore me. There's a middle-aged spinster down to Little Lydford, that Bill Churchward be rather silly after, and she've screwed a bit of news out of him seemingly. She's one of them nasty 'have you heard?' sort of women, always with a bit of news on her lips—generally untrue. And she told your father that you and another here and there was caballing and hatching up a cruel joke at the expense of a certain man and woman very well known round these parts. I

hope 'tis a lie, and I hope you'll tell me 'tis. Then I'll go early to market next Friday and stop at that female's house, and say a thing or two as'll be worse than a mustard poultice to her mean heart."

"Better mind your own business. There's a bit of fun in the air—that's all. Sometimes a nod's as good as a wink to a blind hoss. There's a few self-righteous, damned fools about that won't be any the worse for hearing a thing or two they don't know."

"I don't like to hear you tell that way, and I wish to God you was busier about your own affairs; then you wouldn't be stirring on other people's. Are you the man to set this wrong right? Ax yourself that afore you go farther."

"Yes, I am."

"For my sake, Jar, think better of it."

"Too late now."

"Tell me about it, then."

"You'll know soon enough. 'Tis only a joke, when all's said. We are going to let the rough truth loose for once, and tell a psalm-smiting fool a thing or two he don't know seemingly. Or, if he do know and have winked at it, for his own ends, then so much the more shame to him. Anyway, he shan't think Lydford be in the dark—not after next Monday night."

"You won't tell me what's doing?"

"Go to that field called 'Thornyside,' what miller Taverner owns up above the gorge, presently after nightfall, if you want to know any more. I'll let you hear when the day is fixed. 'Tis only following out an ancient custom. You like the old ways and you like buryings, so the business will just suit you."

"One of them mock funerals!"

"Just so."

"Then you're going to show up a bit of secret sin as you've found out—is that it?"

"If it is?"

Mrs. Weekes was much concerned.

"For my son to meddle in such work as that!" she gasped.

"'Tis fun, I tell you. Damn it all, be I to live my dreary days without never a joke or a laugh to make life better worth? If you knowed a half or a quarter of the dull dog's life I lead now and the hardships I've had of late, you'd be only too glad for me to amuse myself sometimes."

"Don't think to fool me," she said. "You ban't the sort of man—no better than a savage monkey—who'd do a thing like this for fun. You've got your reasons. You be going to strike an enemy."

"Leave it at that, then, since you're so clever."

"Will he leave it at that? I should judge what you be wanting just now are friends, Jar, not enemies. You are going to hurt a man in a terrible tender place. And if you can't make good this charge—what then?"

"I've thought of that. I'm not attacking any man; I'm punishing a man for attacking me. I want money. I go to a chap who is rolling in it. I beg for a trifling loan, and he refuses, for no reason but unkindness and want of charity. 'Tis he has made me his enemy. And now I'll show him up. He's either a blind fool, or else a knave—and the world shall know it one way or t'other."

Mrs. Weekes partly read the remark.

"He's a husband, then, and you be going to let folk know he's—what? wronged or wronging?"

"Go to Jacob Taverner's field and find out," he answered. "I'll say no more at all upon the subject. 'Twill all be done very decently and in order, I promise you. There be those about who remember the same thing often in the past."

"And so do I," said Hephzibah, "and also what comed of one of those May games. A man had another man's life for it after the funeral was over, and the murderer swung in Exeter gaol, though recommended to mercy. You mind what you're doing—else your childer may be orphans and your wife a widow afore hay harvest."

Philip Weekes appeared at this moment, and Jarratt took himself off. He did not go home, but visited the field of Jacob Taverner already mentioned. It lay upon the southern side of Lyd, and Weekes crossed the river by the bridge over the gorge, then entered the croft, climbed its steep side, and knocked at the door of a cowshed which stood in one corner. It was locked from inside, and light and the sound of voices issued from the chinks of the wooden building.

"Who be that?" cried somebody.

"Me—Weekes," answered Jarratt.

The door opened, and he entered, to find three men. One was busy about a strange task; the other two sat on empty cider-barrels and watched him.

"It's getting out," said Weekes. "One of you fools—or else some of the singing boys—have been chattering. 'Tis you, I believe, William, for my father heard it down to Little Lydford from that old maid you'm so fond of."

William Churchward looked up from his work on the ground. He dropped a bundle of long straw and assured Weekes that he must be mistaken.

"I only just said, in a vague way, that one of them famous funerals of the living was on hand, and advised her to be up at Taverner's field on a night I'd let her know."

Jacob Taverner, another of the company, also spoke.

"All the same, we must let the people hear about it. We want all Lydford there on the night, else the fun's spoiled. The more the merrier, surely. It must be blazed abroad."

"In reason. But there's some won't hold with it, and will try to stop it at the last moment."

"They can't," declared old Huggins. "Take care of your pipe, Jacob, or else you'll set William's straw alight and spoil all. They can't stop you, Jarratt, because you'll be 'pon private land. 'Tis Jacob's field, and nobody in the kingdom—not the Queen of England's self—have the power to say what Jacob shall not do on his own ground.

The constable may be allowed in to keep the peace, and that's all."

"When will you have the dolls done, William?" asked Mr. Taverner.

Young Churchward desisted from his labour, rose to his feet, and with an artist's eye regarded two headless dummies upon which he was engaged. They were of full human proportions and represented a male and female. The man's image showed a long and thin figure. It wore brown leggings, riding breeches, and a Norfolk jacket. Spurs were attached to its boots, and from its hand, modelled in putty and painted, there hung a hunting-stock.

"What fashioned tie did the man use to wear?" inquired William.

"Red as often as not," answered Weekes.

"I've nearly done him The legs loll out too much yet, but when young Prowse have knocked up the coffin, we'll fit him in all natural as life."

Then he pointed to the other puppet.

"That's the very daps of *her* round shape," whispered 'the Infant' aside to Weekes, and Jarratt nodded.

"It is," he admitted.

Then he remembered what his mother had said and turned away with a qualm. Anon he fortified his spirit and sneered at himself.

"'Tis a good joke, sure enough. Won't hurt nobody really. But 'twill make a certain psalm-singing fool of a husband come down a peg or two. And well the man deserves it."

For his own comfort Weekes made this remark.

"How if the man breaks your head?" asked Taverner.

"Two can play at that game."

"When be us to know the parties?" piped Mr. Huggins. "I'm all on fire to hear who 'tis."

"You leave that to me," answered William. "When you see their heads stuck on, you'll know who they be well enough. I've had to take Jarratt's word for the man; but

the woman everybody in Lydford will swear to, or I'm no painter."

"Be the putty dried out, 'Infant'?" asked Weekes.

"Very nearly. I've got the paints mixed and a fine lot of corded rope the very colour of——"

"Stop! That'll tell 'em!" cautioned the elder.

Then William rose and whispered to the senior conspirator.

"And the very thing for the eyes—a piece of luck. I was wandering along thinking of 'em, when what should I see in a rubbish heap but a broken plate—blue as the sky! I've chipped a pair of eyeballs and put the pupils in."

He showed enthusiasm for his unlovely task, and Weekes encouraged him.

Then Churchward returned to his dummy and filled the nether garments of the male figure with straw.

"Mustn't have too much," he said, "for by all accounts he's a thin man—a mere skeleton of a man."

Mr. Huggins rose.

"I be going, souls," he said. "These here lifeless carpses be getting to make me go goose-flesh along the spine. That true to life—that cruel true they be—that I shall dream bad dreams about 'em if I sit here gloating any more. They be a masterpiece of horror and dreadfuller without their heads than with 'em. I'll ax you to see me up the hill, Jacob, for 'tis a very difficult task for me to breast it alone at my age."

"So I will, then," answered Taverner. "And we'll drop into Noah Pearn's at the top."

"Spirits 'twill be for me, if anything," said Valentine. "I'm a bit down-daunted along of this gashly spectacle, and I'm almost sorry now I called upon my memory to help. 'Twill vex somebody for certain, and at my great age us ought to rise above politics. 'Tis a terrible gift of likeness-making the 'Infant' have got; but for my part I'd sooner be a common man, wi'out any such devilish cleverness."

"Don't you fear," said William. "Nobody will pull your old nose."

The painter, quite oblivious of the grave issues behind this outrage, pursued his operations in a light and cheerful spirit. Once taken in hand, he became exceedingly interested in his bizarre task; and now he had grown enthusiastic. He regarded the dolls as an advertisement of neglected talents, and he was only sorry that so much careful work must presently be buried in the earth. But he hoped it might be possible to dig his masterpieces up again.

At home, under lock and key, he had fashioned two heads of putty. One, albeit still unpainted, indubitably resembled Sarah Jane; the other—a shrunken visage, with eyes made of grey slate and high cheek-bones, represented the farmer, Hilary Woodrow. A mass of bright tow hair fell about the female face; the male puppet wore a round hat. Presently William intended to paint these effigies up to the colour of life. Sarah Jane he had secretly studied when she came to visit his sister. Her pure, bright skin, just beginning to take the kiss of the sun as he warmed the spring again, he already knew. As for the male doll, putty-colour came almost near enough to the cadaverous deterioration of the original.

"How long will it be afore all's ready?" asked Jarratt.

"A matter of three days. I'll bring the heads up in a basket an hour before the show. Taverner's going to look after the torches, and Dicky Prowse fetches up the coffins after dark Sunday."

"I'm only thinking of the man. Monday's the best day for him. He goes into Tavistock often of a Monday, and comes home by Lydford way. The point is to hit on a night when he'll be passing by here just at the proper moment. We must made dead sure of him. If he don't actually come face to face with the funeral, half the fun's out of it."

William Churchward assented to this opinion.

"I'd dearly like to coax her here also; but perhaps that would be a thought too rough," he said.

"Yes, we can't do that. I'm not desirous to hurt her at all. 'Tis him I'm aiming at—just to let the gas out of

him a bit and larn him that he ain't under the special care and charge of Providence, but have to share the rough edge of things along with his betters."

William nodded.

"Of course you've got proof positive," he said.

"I have—my own eyes and another pair. Besides that I've got her, come to think of it. You know her fashion. 'Tis true, I reckon, that she never told it; but when 'tis blowed, she won't deny it, whatever the farmer might be tempted to do. Anyway, he's at death's door, so we shan't hurt him."

"If 'twas a thing of yesterday, I should be rather frightened of the job," confessed William. "But seeing the matter's five years old and more—what's the odds to any sensible person?"

"Quite right. If they let it hurt 'em—more fools them. Anyway, the man's no friend to me, or anybody else, for all his cant. He's brought this on himself."

"There—that's about all I can do for this pair of legs," said William. "Now we'll lock up and be gone. Come and see 'Sarah Jane.' You'll want to kiss her when I've painted her!"

CHAPTER XII

THE MOCK BURIAL

For various reasons the event of the mock burial was postponed until a night in late June; and then, through the dewy twilight of evening, numerous persons proceeded from Lydford and outlying hamlets to the field known as Thorny-

side above the river. Many motives took the company, but not one amongst them knew the facts. Certain folk felt interested in the revival of an ancient use; others were only concerned with the excitement of a new thing; and most attended from morbid desire to know what man and woman were to suffer this public denunciation and rebuke.

The light waned after nine o'clock, and the dots and clusters of spectators decreased upon the roads and thronged into a black mass about the centre of Jacob Taverner's field. In the midst two graves had been dug, and beside them, on trestles, lay two coffins close together. The lids hid their contents. A rope fastened between stakes ran round to prevent spectators from crowding upon performers.

Walter Agg and Peter Lethbridge were among the people. They smoked their pipes, stood at the ring-side, and joked with the men about them.

"When be the covers to be lifted, so as we shall see the parties?" asked Lethbridge.

Mr. Nathaniel Spry was near and answered.

"When the torches are lighted, I believe. The procession comes down from the cowshed over there. It is all to be done in the old way. Mr. Huggins and Mr. Churchward both remember the ceremony in their youth; and they were able to furnish the particulars. Wasn't you, Mr. Churchward?"

"I was," said Adam, who stood close at hand. "In my boyhood's days much was done that has been since forgotten. The common people have a rough sense of poetic justice. So has the human race in general. Jarratt Weekes, my son-in-law, asked me to be the minister on this occasion and read the burial service; but I refused, because it was contrary to the dignity of my age or my calling. Moreover, Jarratt will do it himself."

"He's the leading spirit, then?" asked Agg.

"I am violating no confidence when I answer that he is," replied Adam. "He has an active sense of justice—a thing specially acute in those who are suffering from in-

justice. I fear we are about to administer a harsh lesson to some erring brother and sister. Yet who shall say it won't be well deserved?"

"Perhaps the parties will," suggested Lethbridge; "bound to come as an ugly shock to them, no doubt."

"You are quite right, my man," declared Nathaniel Spry. "It is a very tragical thought, isn't it, Mr. Churchward? that the very people themselves may at this moment be laughing and joking by these graves, little knowing that their own effigies are lying within a few yards of them in those boxes."

"A very tragical thought indeed," admitted the schoolmaster. "So much so, in fact, that I wish we had three or four more constables here, instead of merely Arthur Routleigh. He is a good man enough for keeping order amid ordinary people; but he might lose his head at a crisis. However, he has the majesty of the Law behind him."

"Jimmery! There's Joe Tapson!" cried Agg suddenly. "What the mischief's that on his head?"

Mr. Tapson, clad in black, with flowing mourning bands fluttering from an old beaver hat, passed hastily and disappeared into the cowshed.

"He's the undertaker," explained Mr. Spry. "Everything is done in the proper way, so that the ceremony may be solemn and awe-striking. They wanted Valentine Huggins to be undertaker, but the old man was frightened to do anything so prominent. Then they asked me, but I had to refuse owing to my official position in Lydford as postmaster under Government."

"There goeth Noah Pearn, with his man and a barrel of beer," said Lethbridge. "He'll broach it under the hedge. Never loses a chance, that chap."

The crowd increased and began to grow impatient. Shouts were directed to the cowshed, which was now illuminated brightly from within. Then Mr. Huggins, in deep black, against which his white beard shone luminously, came out and hobbled to the policeman in charge of the ring.

"Tell 'em the procession moves at ten o'clock sharp, will 'e, Arthur? And mind you have a way cleared through the people to the graveside, so there shan't be nothing onseemly done."

Mr. Routleigh raised his voice and proclaimed the news. Then he drove some boys out of the ring. They had crept in behind him and were trying to peep under the coffin lids.

Not many women were present, though many desired to be. Their men in most cases had forbidden them. Certain wives, however, who were not under dominion, attended the rite; and among these stood Mrs. Philip Weekes. Her daughter-in-law was beside her and, hidden from them, Susan Huggins and her gamekeeper also mingled with the people.

"I don't like it, whoever 'tis," declared Hephzibah. "But since it had to be, I'm here. To bury the living be a very terrible piece of work, and I hope to heaven nothing evil will come of it."

"She deserves it, whoever she be," said Jarratt's wife.

"You mean you don't know who 'tis?"

"Not me, mother."

Mrs. Weekes sniffed.

"It puzzles my spirit to know how a man can keep anything hidden from his wife. If I'd been in your shoes, I'd have got the woman's name, and the man's name too, out of my husband double quick. Guy Fawkes and angels! —who be they, I should like to know, to keep their two-penny-halfpenny thoughts from us? A son's different. Of course I couldn't make Jarratt tell me. I wish they'd get on with it. The dew be going through my shoes and chilling me to the knees."

The church clock presently struck ten and a wave of excitement rippled round the rope. People swept this way and that, as people will. Shouts and laughter rose. The grass, trampled under many feet, emitted its own odour, and from the open earth a faint smell came. The sky was clear and a few stars twinkled. Light still hung westward,

and the great bulk of Lydford Castle loomed square and black against it.

A dance of many flames suddenly flashed through the grey gloom of summer night. The dew answered, and the earth was streaked and shot with points of fire. Above the smoky effulgence of the torches, the sky appeared to grow very dark. Everything outside this radiance of orange flame disappeared and was lost. Only within the glare the procession appeared and moved forward—a medley of lurid lights and ink black shadows.

"They're coming, they're coming!" cried many voices, and the solitary policeman, opening the rope, struggled to make a way for them. Agg, Lethbridge, and others, seeing his efforts futile, lent their aid, and presently into the ring the performers slowly came with torches waving above them. From the shed which they had left there echoed a hollow reverberation, repeated at intervals of half a minute. This represented the lich bell. A hymn rose as the procession approached, and the shrill treble voices of six boys singing together sounded thin and strange under the night.

The choir, in long white smocks, led the way. Then came six men with torches; and then Mr. Huggins and Mr. Taverner appeared as mourners. More torches followed, and Jarratt Weekes next played his part in a parson's gown with a broad black stole hung over it. On one side of him walked a boy with a book; on the other side a boy carried a tall candle. The huge shape of the 'Infant' in black, with a hat-band streaming behind him, followed; and at his side walked Joe Tapson, similarly attired. The disparity in their sizes created much merriment.

Into the ring they came. The boys took their places between the graves; the men stuck their torches into sconces arranged for them upon poles.

Then attention was paid to the coffins. Jarratt opened the book and the boy with the big candle held it aloft, so that the light fell upon the page. All was done with absolute order and decorum. The spectators, not the performers,

threatened to break the peace. A great sheaf of light rose up into the darkness; a babel of voices echoed. Laughter and shouts resounded round the ring, and under the flickering fire the people searched each other's faces and called out greetings. An effect impish and demonian danced upon every countenance. Flame and darkness played at hoodman-blind together, and now features were distorted, and now whole bodies loomed huge or shrank and shrivelled under the light. Mrs. Weekes observed this sinister transformation.

"Never seed such a shocking sight," she said to Philip. "We'm like a ring of evil apes. 'Tis a flouting of religion to play these tricks with it, and I wish I'd not been such a fool as to come. To see us, you'd think 'twas Bostock's wild beasts, not Lydford, had broke loose. Just look at the awful shape Adam Churchward cuts!"

"He don't look worse than he feels, if 'tis with him as it is with me," answered Philip.

Elsewhere Agg spoke to Lethbridge.

"Can you mark Brendon? He was coming up a thought before ten o'clock from the station, and he promised to look out for us. I'm afraid he'll miss the fun."

"Can't see him; but he may be here," answered Peter. "Look at Jacob Taverner. I'll die of laughing in a minute. The toad's pretending to cry!"

Jarratt Weekes at this moment shouted for peace. Then Joe Tapson and William Churchward approached the coffin-lids, while a very real silence fell as the dolls were revealed. The creator's heart beat fast under his great bosom. He hungered to hear a shout of instant recognition; and indeed this was not long delayed.

With a ghostly semblance of life the effigies stared out, and the feet of the coffins were lowered so that all might see. The throng massed in front of the show, and the ring side behind the performers was left empty.

What the people saw was a long, thin doll in riding breeches, Norfolk jacket, and hard hat. It stared out with

sunken, sallow cheeks, and the torchlight played upon its life-size, life-like body. In the other coffin lay the female doll, and her tow hair was drawn back from her forehead and her red lips smiled. The face had been most carefully modelled and painted; therefore its resemblance to Sarah Jane Brendon was clear to all who knew her.

"God's light! what's this?" Lethbridge asked loudly; but Agg did not answer.

A great murmur shook the throng. Names were cried back and forward. A few laughed, some already shouted angrily for the mummery to cease.

"'Tis Sarah Jane and Hilary Woodrow—sure as I'm a sinful man," said Philip Weekes to his wife.

She did not answer, but glared at the figures.

Several voices cried out "Sarah Jane Brendon!" Others remembered the vanished farmer and named him. A spirit decidedly averse from the performers was apparent in the crowd, and Philip Weekes voiced it.

"This is a damned, wicked, wanton shame!" he roared out; "and I say it, though my own son's mixed in it."

"Order—order!" yelled a voice or two.

Mr. Huggins tried to get out of the ring, but was drawn back by the Infant. Mr. Churchward and Mr. Spry among the spectators also showed fear, and the latter, feeling that the sooner he departed from Thornyside the better for his reputation, set out to do so. Adam, in much concern, followed him. Jarratt Weekes, unmoved, proceeded grimly with the service as long as he could be heard. He had seen what none else had as yet; he had marked where the great form of Daniel Brendon suddenly reared itself behind the crowd. His voice shook at the sight, but he proceeded—

"'Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery. He cometh up and is cut——'"

Then shouts drowned his voice and a resolute and angry faction got over the rope with intent to stop the proceedings.

Mr. Taverner was appealed to by Jarratt Weekes.

"Stop 'em—stop 'em!—they can't interfere. This is private land!" he shouted.

But Jacob had gone over to the other side.

"If I'd known who it was——" he began, and stripped his mourning band off his hat.

At this sign the ring was broken up; a torch fell here and there and illuminated the open graves; then, like the sudden charge of some great beast, Brendon, who had at last understood, ploughed through the people and cast them to right and left. In another moment his hand was on the collar of Jarratt Weekes. With one sweep of his arm he tore the surplice off; then he dashed the book aside; and then he shook the mummer till Jarratt screamed and an answering scream came from his mother.

"Speak," said Daniel. "Tell me why you've done this; and tell me why I shouldn't let the life out of you for doing it!"

"Let go my neck, then," answered the other. Then he shouted to the people, "Why don't you pull this fool away? D'you want to see me killed?"

"Sarve you right," cried a dozen voices. "We'd do the like if we was the husband!"

"Speak!" repeated Brendon. His eyes burnt redder than the flames of the torch-fires round him.

"Then I will. I've done this thing because it was true. 'Ask John Prout. True afore the living God; and may He blast me, and strike me with all the curses of hell for all eternity now and for evermore if it ban't true. True!—ask Prout—ask them we've mimicked here—they'll not deny it!"

He pointed to the puppets staring mildly up at their makers.

For a moment Brendon held off and glared round him.

"Don't you believe the filthy liar, Dan!" bellowed Ag from the crowd.

"Let God strike me blind and mad now afore the people if it's not true. Prout saw it—with his own eyes he saw

it. Kill me if you like—but it's true—true as the Bible is true—and you'll live to know it," cried Weekes; and his grim earnestness appeared to affect the principal listener.

Ignorant of what was doing, the boy in the shed still struck an old iron bin to imitate a passing bell. The sound acted on the people as a drum on a dervish. Brendon stood irresolute.

"Fling the beastly man into one of them graves and that big, fat fool after him!" shouted a voice.

There was a rush for Weekes and William Churchward. Mud and stones were flung, and a clod struck Jarratt in the mouth.

"Let him go—don't be cowards—let the man take his folly away!" cried Hephzibah shrilly; but none listened. Amid roars and shouts the mob surrounded Weekes and the younger Churchward. Joe Tapson and the choir boys were kicked heartily; Mr. Huggins had escaped in time, and now lurked behind a distant hedge and waited trembling to see what might happen. The people next threw the dolls out of their coffins, trod their putty faces into pulp and played football with their limbs. A man embraced the female figure amid roars of laughter. Then he danced with it.

Half a dozen resolute labourers dragged the Infant into one grave; while others, including a private enemy or two, tied Weekes within an empty coffin and lowered him into the second pit.

The passing bell still boomed on. Then the policeman, whose efforts towards maintaining peace were vain, did a definite thing, rushed up to the cowshed and stopped it.

Elsewhere Noah Pearn suffered. He had been standing rather anxiously beside his beer barrel, until some reckless spirits discovered the drink, and summoned others. Then Pearn was thrust into a ditch without ceremony, and his liquor consumed under the darkness. Many of the men present had come for miles, and those who belonged to the

neighbourhood cared nothing for the publican's threats. They drank and presently emptied the barrel. Then a few intoxicated jesters began to throw earth on Weekes and William Churchward, and it was not until the parents of the two sufferers summoned aid and resolutely attacked the reckless party, that Jarratt and the bruised and battered Infant were rescued.

The torches expired and the folk at last departed. They left nothing to mark the event but a torn and trampled field, the dismembered limbs of the puppets, and the shattered timbers of their coffins.

Dawn found these things in their hideousness, and it also rose upon two men deep in conversation together. Agg and Lethbridge, appreciating the gravity of the position, had hurried home that some preparation for Daniel's coming might be made. But he did not come. They waited ready to intercept him and learn his mood and his intentions; then night passed and morning failed to bring him. Therefore they guessed that he must have followed the word of Jarratt Weekes literally, and turned his face to the sea that he might speak with Prout. They scorned the story, and dared not name it at Ruddyford. But at the earliest opportunity they despatched a telegram to Prout from Mary Tavy and warned him that he must stand between Daniel Brendon and the master.

"He'll soon calm the man down, if 'tis false, as it must be," said Agg. "Pray God no note of this gets to Sarah Jane's ears; yet that's a vain hope, for everybody on Dartymoor will be chattering of it inside twelve hours."

"I'm thinking of the man," answered Lethbridge. "If 'tis false, he'll have the hide off Jarratt-Weekes for this night's work; and if 'twas true, he wouldn't stop short of——"

"'True'! Who that have ever met that clean, fearless creature would dare say it? Prout will calm the man down; but Lord pity them who get within reach of Brendon's rage when he goes into Lydford again."

"He may have believed it, however, and gone from that field and hanged himself," argued Lethbridge.

"Never! Would he wrong his wife like that—or Mr. Woodrow either? No, he ban't the sort to let a lie change him. This blackguard thing calls to be answered, and these insulted people will answer it."

"Daniel will for 'em, more likely. Master's so good as buried in real earnest and far beyond fighting; and as for Sarah Jane, 'tis her husband's part to make her name and fame sweet afore the nation."

"Which he will do—have no fear of that," answered Walter Agg.

At an early hour they despatched their telegram and Prout received it. Half guessing the truth, he waited in fearful anxiety; but Brendon did not come.

CHAPTER XIII

ANOTHER EFFIGY

From the pandemonium of the mock burial Daniel Brendon took himself unseen. The advice of Jarratt Weekes appeared to be reasonable, and he decided to follow it. He was told to ask Prout, and he determined to do so. He roamed through darkness, and the past turned back like a scroll, and he read into the recent years far more than Prout could tell him. It was not possible to reach Dawlish until the following day, and long before the summer dawn returned Brendon had passed beyond thought of Prout to that of his master.

Under deep and silent woods, by waste places and along lonely roads he went. The voices of night whispered round him, and sleeping trees sighed, shivered, and slept again as he passed them by. Nocturnal creatures were his companions; the solitary hare limped along before him; the owl and the night-jar cried from the wood; once he passed a colony of glow-worms, where they twinkled in the dewy grass, like a tiny constellation.

His mind suffered the gigantic convulsion proper to this blow. Within one hour of leaving Lydford, he believed. His inherent instincts, smothered through five years by kindness, hushed by gentle words, lulled by immense generosity, tore their way through these artifices and saw all that had been hidden, and far more. The goodness of Woodrow rotted as Daniel thought of it; and even his conversion stank. Brendon saw himself hoodwinked, laughed at, deceived—seduced, like a child, with sugar-plums, rendered harmless with gifts, muzzled and deluded with fields and beasts and great possessions. He had worshipped and obeyed his God for this; he had sung praises to the Almighty, and toiled in the ways of righteousness for this. The Everlasting had watched it all, had listened to his prayers, had marked his mighty efforts, had waited until the cup was full before striking it from the lip of His servant. Brendon turned from God to man, thought upon his enemy, and considered the plot that had robbed him of his honour. Not until the light of dawn awoke upon a world of young green and silver dew, did Sarah Jane enter into his mind; and then he determined with himself that she must stand beside her paramour. He could not remotely guess at the truth of the past five years; it was natural that he should conceive a web of heartless and cruel deception woven from their united cunning and daily wrapped closer about himself. They knew him so well: his weak spots were so familiar to them, that the rest was easy. They had laughed at his complacent and devout trust in God a thousand times; doubtless they had grown accustomed

to their sin and finally become careless. It was natural that all the world should know before it fell upon his ears. He read the whole story; he saw Woodrow handing over the farm in exchange for what he wanted more; he imagined Sarah Jane making the bargain. Anon Woodrow pretended to Christianity and Sarah Jane also affected an attitude of increased prayer and devotion. All was dust—dust flung by cruel hands and hard hearts to blind him.

His life crashed down, like a tree thrown in March. So had he seen a great elm fall. One moment it stood in full and glorious dignity of adult growth, the sun upon its crown and rosy inflorescence of flowers meshed within a grey mist of the young twigs; then the saw gnawed to its heart, the axe rang, the mallet drove the wedge, and the whole mighty edifice, falling in thunder, lay crushed flat by its own weight, maimed, wrecked, shattered, and utterly destroyed. Only a raw disc in the hedge marked the place whence it had sprung upward, to be a theatre for the loveliness of spring and autumn, a home for the storm-thrush, a harp for the winter wind.

Now the fabric of his fortunes similarly collapsed, and he found all that had looked so healthy was flourishing upon foundations of putrescence and decay. No canker had eaten into his life and ruined it; no sudden misfortune had grown and turned what was fair to what was foul; but, in ignorance, with immense labour, he had built upon stark fraud and filth and his own dishonour; he had founded his life on falsehoods and sins; he had worshipped his God in unconsciousness of the truth; he had been drawn to closer and deeper intercourse with Christ through the cold-blooded villainy of a man. His ambitions, aims and future schemes were all rooted and flourishing in his own betrayal; and his God had suffered this appalling thing to come to pass, and denied him one dim hint or whisper of the truth. At the crucial moment, when Woodrow made him his heir, the Almighty had blinded Daniel's native instinct and not permitted even a suspicion of reality to

be associated with the gift. All had combined against him; all had cozened his understanding: his wife, his master, his God. Man and Heaven had united to deceive him; and man, knowing the truth, had watched his sustained devotion and faith; and Heaven, knowing the truth, had accepted his worship and thanksgiving, had suffered his delusion to continue, had planned the horror of the end.

Every wind of the night came to him with a new grief; every scent of the night brought a new agony; every voice of the night drove home the truth with an added torment. He looked up at the stars and asked them what he should do. From force of habit he knelt and called upon God. But he remembered that, in this matter, God was on the side of the enemy. Therefore he rose and went forward without prayer.

By morning he had walked many miles along the foothills of the Moor; and then, after five o'clock, he went down to a railway station, waited for the first train, and travelled to Plymouth. He suffered himself to rest there for a time; and he washed and ate. Henceforth he was concerned with Hilary Woodrow and not with John Prout. He perceived clearly that the old man, who would have sacrificed his soul for Hilary, had helped his wife and Woodrow against him. He retraced events of many journeys. He thought of the days that he had been from home, and of the time spent by his wife at Dawlish. He forged a long and dreadful chain of horrible deceits that had never existed. He began to imagine an evil story which occupied a place in time long after the actual treachery was over and done. Upon the fact of his betrayal he built a mighty monument; yet this memorial had itself scarcely any existence in fact. That, however, mattered little. The truth without addition had been enough for Brendon.

Day was turned to night in his mind, and he longed for the real night, that he might accomplish his purpose. About noon he took train to Dawlish, and reached it before three o'clock.

He bought bread and ate it to support himself; then he went into the woods above the town and lurked there until the dark. His decision was come to, and he intended to destroy both Woodrow and Sarah Jane. They should perish; and at that moment he would have killed his God too if he had known how. For a short time, indeed, his fetich was dead enough; because to find what he had believed a Creator's sustained and benignant attention proved instead one cruel, long-drawn trick and jest, shook the man to the roots of his faith. Such action seemed not compatible with any conception of a loving, a just, and an all-powerful father.

For an hour he cursed God like a fallen Titan; but only for an hour. Then lifelong trust and faith conquered, and even at this crisis atrophied reason proved too weak to grasp its opportunity. Faith re-took the citadel. He reflected upon his Bible, and presently perceived that nothing had happened to him which was contrary to the common way of God with man. The Jehovah he adored; He who once drowned every little child in the whole world; the Being who led Israel into the desert of Sinai; who slew Uzzah for steadying His ark; who killed seventy thousand innocent men because David numbered his people; who commanded whole nations to be slaughtered and their virgins only saved for the conquerors; who prescribed rules for slavery; who destroyed the firstborn of all Egypt, and tore ten thousand mothers' hearts; who loved the stench and smear of blood upon His altars, and pursued His foes with the tenacity, cruelty and craft of a Red Indian—this Everlasting Spirit might most reasonably be expected to play the faithless savage and torture even the least of those who worshipped His omnipotent name. But it was not for his creature to question Him; it was not for a thinking being to spurn this almighty pest with scorn and with loathing; it was not for a smitten man to ask how any Prince of Devils could worse confound his own creation.

Brendon offered the other cheek; and before he stole out

from his hiding-place in the forest and went down where Woodrow dwelt, he was safe in the grip of his God once more. The fact, however, did not alter his determination, because this revelation of his own ordained ruin and destruction brought others in its train. Subsequent actions were clearly indicated to him by the Being he still obeyed; for Daniel was not wholly sane now. Streaks and flashes of madness touched the tissue of his thoughts, as sparks fly in smoke. Barriers fell, old orderly opinions perished, strangled by the horde of ferocious ideas that hurtled through his mind. From the broken links of dead principles a new thing was welded, and method and purpose were restored. He believed in predestination, and through that hypothesis he came back humbly to the footstool of his idol. He perceived that the World-maker had chosen him to drive the knife into these evil hearts. For that purpose, the infinitely wise, infinitely just, infinitely loving God of his fathers had called him from the womb; had suffered him to live and thrive; had ordered his life prosperously; had taught him from his youth up to worship Heaven, and walk uprightly before men. To this end his faith had been founded upon adamant, and tempered to move mountains; to this end the Sun of Righteousness had warmed his spirit; and now the fruit of his spirit was about to ripen in murder.

For a time the natural rage that consumed him cooled a little before these high mandates. The inversion of his intellect was complete; and though there came to him a fear that he was about to do this thing that he might gratify a personal lust and hunger for revenge, he put that temptation away as of the Devil. He believed that the powers of darkness urged him to spare his wife and his master; while Jehovah ordered their instant death. To let them live now would be to frustrate their Maker's plan—a thing unthinkable. He longed for a Bible that he might wallow in the atrocities of the Pentateuch and find wherewithal to strengthen his arm there.

He was very nearly insane at this crisis—madder than

it happens to most to be at any time. Yet few there are, capable of intense feeling, who have not stood at the veil, looked behind it in dreams or calentures, and seen the red-eyed spirit glare like a gorgon out. She peers forth by night, and the dreaming brain knows her well; at times of terrific joy or grief she is near; after physical excesses she comes close; surfeit or starvation alike summon her; she is the firstling of superstition, the familiar of the fanatic.

This man walked with madness that night for a little time, and not until he had returned to the lamp-lit streets did the unholy thing depart from him. Then he affirmed his spirit, prayed fervent prayers, and tramped by the sea a while, before going upon his business. He meant to kill Woodrow with his naked hands.

Before the row of dwellings wherein the sick man lay, Daniel became puzzled, for he had forgotten the house. It was only by chance that he rang at the right one.

Some time elapsed before any answer came; then the door opened upon darkness, and Brendon did not know that it was Prout who stood before him.

"Who bides here?" he asked, and his voice startled him, for the tone was strange.

"Death, my son," answered the other.

Brendon pushed the old man aside, strode in, and then found that John told the truth.

Hilary Woodrow lay in his bed. The room was lighted by a gas chandelier, but only one jet burnt there. Brendon's mind leapt over the abysses of the last four-and-twenty hours.

"This is not him," he said. "You've dragged that doll back again to deceive me!"

"He died afore noon to-day, and yours was the last name on his lips in this world. Maybe the first in the next."

"Let him scream it in hell—the blasted, faithless villain! Dead—he's not dead—he knows what I'm here for—he's foxing now, as he has foxed me all his life—foul, heartless, godless monster that he was!"

"Daniel—Daniel—for God's sake—a dead man, Daniel!"

"Out on his death and out on you, you go-between! To hold my hand and swear friends, and help them into each other's arms behind my back—God of light and reason! why be such rank poison as you allowed to——?"

He broke off and stared where the colourless clay of his master gazed blankly up—just as the doll had gazed. Insolence seemed to sit on the dust—the insolence of a mean spirit that had narrowly escaped harm and now, in safety, turned to jeer. Brendon roared and cursed the corpse, while Prout implored him to be sane.

"This happened five years ago and more," cried the old man; "'twas all over then for ever."

"All over—for them it might have been. What of me? . . . All over but the payment. . . . What of me, I say? . . . Blight his dim, damned eyes—blight him lying there and telling the truth with his dumb lips now he's safe from me. . . . What of me? 'All ended'! It's only begun for me. The reaping's mine—the reaping of this devil's crop. Mine to put in God's sickle now!"

"Nought but the whirlwind will you reap, poor man. Turn to your God, and don't blaspheme Him. Call on Him, afore you do what can't be undone. For pity, Daniel—for pity. He's gone to answer for what he did. Leave her to God too."

The man grew calmer and reflected before answering.

"Mine's a difficult God, you must know," he said. "He's come between again. Only vengeance be God's, but justice belongs to us seemingly. This wasn't justice—to let that lying adulterer slip away in peace like he has! I comed to strangle him, and God's stepped between again—robbed me again. 'Tis almost more than a faithful soldier and servant can endure, John Prout. Job's self wasn't called to face a thing like this. I've been deserted, look you, for no fault of my own. Robbed—robbed of all my earnings, and my honour, and my hopes."

He was silent a moment, then rage broke bounds again.

"Let Him take care—let Him that's reigning above Heaven take care, else one more soul will be damned. He can steal everything from me but hell; but that's in all men's reach. We can rob Him of our immortal souls! That's in my power, and why not? What's Heaven to me now? I'd rather follow this devil down—down—if 'tis only to hunt and harry him through raging fire for evermore! . . . Even that I'll do . . . when she's gone. Evil for evil will I pay my God, and choose my portion with them that ruined me!"

"Man, man—I implore you by my grey hairs, Daniel!"

"Curse your grey hairs! who are you to squeak? You helped this man to hell—you know it! Cold he be now—but he'll roast for it for ever; and may it be mine to trample him into the hot eye of the fire, till he's red through, and the marrow runs out of his damned bones! Why is he dead—why is he dead now? I was his death—fashioned by the Almighty's plan to be his death—born to be his death. Bring him back! Bring him back! Be the God of Ages a fool to let all His planning and plotting fall to nought? Who is Death to stand grinning between me and this filthy clay? Be he stronger than the God that conquered him? Curse him, and curse heaven and hell that's caught this man away from me in his last hour."

Now he seemed to realize the other's absolute escape; and he lifted his voice, howled horribly, turned upon the dead, and struck Woodrow's forehead.

Thereupon Prout flung himself at Brendon with all his weak might, and cried shame, and called upon him to be a man and not a beast. But Daniel swept him off and went out.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LONELY ALTARS

BEFORE noon on the day after Hilary Woodrow's death two men advanced towards Ruddyford farm. One went slowly on foot; the other rode as hard as his horse could carry him. While Brendon climbed White Hill and stopped for several minutes beside the cairns upon its summit, Jarratt Weekes leapt off his horse at the farmyard gate and hurried into the house.

He had learnt that Brendon was returning home from Lydford station, and he had instantly set out to go before him and give Sarah Jane warning. Not, however, until his arrival at Ruddyford did he realize the whole truth or appreciate the effects of his recent action.

It was Sarah Jane herself who told him, and his terror at the recital contrasted forcibly with her calmness.

"Agg broke all to me yesterday," she said. "My husband went to Dawlish to kill Woodrow. I want no words with you, nor any other man now. You can't alter what's got to be."

"For God's sake let me save you!" he implored. "'Tis murder on my soul for ever if he does you any hurt."

"See you to that," she said; then she turned to Tabitha Prout. "I know my way clear enough. The man's on the road. When he comes, you can tell him that I be gone up-along to the peat works, and have taken the boy with me. He'll understand."

She left them and went to her own cottage. There she took a pencil and wrote a few words on a piece of paper. The brief letter she folded up, put into an envelope, and addressed to Daniel. Next she called her child.

"Us be going up to the peat works, Gregory. Come along quick, my pretty."

"Hurrah!" said he; and as soon as Sarah Jane had put on her sun-bonnet, they started over the Moor for Great Links. Her letter was in her pocket. She knew that her husband must presently appear on the summit of White Hill; and from that point he could not fail to see her. She understood why he had come, and what he would do. No shadow of fear for herself clouded her understanding now. She perceived very fully what this terrific discovery must mean to Brendon, and unutterable grief for him was at her heart. Hilary had escaped, and she was thankful, both for Daniel and the dead. Now she went up through the unspeakable glories of a cloudless June day; and sometimes her hand tightened on the hand of her child.

Below, Agg, Weekes, and Lethbridge held earnest converse. The terror of Jarratt made the others contemptuous.

"Give over shouting out to your God, you dirty cur," said Walter Agg. "Well may you shake in your shoes. If yonder man, as be coming now, was sane and not mad, 'tis you that he'd put out of the way, and I could hope that he will do so yet. To betray her—you blasted rogue! You'll be damned afore any of us for it—that's one comfort."

"'Twas never meant to turn to this—God's my judge, I didn't foresee any such thing."

"Get out of honest men's eyes and hang yourself, like the Judas you be. I would break your head this moment and rejoice in it, if I hadn't to keep my strength for yonder man."

"I can do no more," said Weekes. "I call you to witness that I comed here afore him to warn her. She might have escaped him if she chose to do it."

"Where be she now?" asked Lethbridge, and Tabitha Prout spoke.

"She went to her own house, so soon as she heard Daniel was on the way."

Weekes returned into the yard, where his horse stood. Then he pointed to the hill.

"He cometh!"

On the cairn, motionless, stood Brendon. They watched him, and presently he began to descend. Jarratt Weekes rode away. Agg took off his coat and tightened his belt.

"Be you going to help me withstand that man, Peter?" he asked calmly; but Lethbridge refused.

"No, I ban't," he answered. "I'll die in my bed a few years hence for choice. This be none of my business. You know him. The man of common strength that stands between him and her now will be broken for it. She might have been saved, but she wouldn't be, an' there's an end."

The great moment in Walter Agg's life had come.

"Broken, or not broken, I'll do what I can," he said.

They looked up the hill again to see that Daniel Brendon no longer approached them. He had caught sight of Sarah Jane far away, and already near the summit of Great Links. Instantly he changed his course, and proceeded directly over the Moor toward her.

Seeking the reason of his action, Agg and Lethbridge also marked Sarah Jane, now above a mile away on the heights.

"God Almighty, she's run for it—too late!" cried Lethbridge; but Agg had already left him. He knew that he could cut off Brendon, and started to do so. They met far below Great Links, and by the time that they did so Sarah Jane had already reached the summit. She sat there for a space, took her farewell of the world, drank her last draught of the glory of the summer sun and the splendour of the summer earth.

Like a dream picture painted in milk and gold, rich with magic light even in the pearly shadows, overflowing with the lustre and fervour of June, Devon spread before her feet and rolled in sunlit leagues to the horizons of the sea. There lacked no gracious beauty proper to that scene. It rose beyond perfection to sublimity, lifted her watching spirit higher than any praise; begot the serene, still sadness that reigns above all joy.

The mundane matter of Brendon's meeting with Agg

interested her but little. Like the struggle of two ants it seemed in the midst of that huge loneliness. She saw the figures run together and turn and twist a moment. Then the lesser was shot violently away and fell sprawling. The prone atom writhed for a second and was still; the other came on.

"Poor Walter!" thought Sarah Jane.

Her heart throbbed farewell to the only world she had known; and, gazing upward, she was glad that the sky shone blue over her death.

As Daniel Brendon stood and gazed upon Ruddyford from the barrows of White Hill, he had suddenly recollected two former occasions when the distant farm spread before him with special significance. His first vision of it in storm came to his mind, and he remembered how that he had descended, and entered into the life of the place, and toiled mightily to advance the welfare of the farm and its master. Then came the moment when, fresh from reading Hilary Woodrow's will, he had gazed upon the land of promise and, by slow stages, grasped the tremendous truth that all he saw within these boundaries would presently be his own. Vividly he remembered that occasion, and how, lifted by the actual spectacle of Ruddyford, he had turned back again to the giver and renewed his gratitude. And now he looked upon his own, and called on his God to shatter it with lightning, to burn it with fire, to bury it and blot it out, like the cities of the plain. He hungered to be at the work, to tear its foundations from their granite roots, to blast the bed it lay on, to leave no trace upon earth by which man might remember it.

He moved a little way onward; then suddenly saw the woman and child. He stopped, shielded his eyes from the light and recognized them. The man felt glad that she understood why he had come. It was better to make an end up aloft on the lonely altars, than within the cursed confines

of the farm. He knew that she was going to the peat-works; that she understood his coming. His mind was calm now and steadfastly settled to destroy her. He changed his course and proceeded leisurely towards Great Links. Already he said to himself that Sarah Jane should sleep beside her father and die where he died.

Then ran Walter Agg and stood against him and tried to stay him. The battle between them was not of long duration, and to the weaker man happened what Lethbridge foretold. He was flung down with terrific violence; he fell upon a rock and his leg was broken. Brendon left him there without any word and went on to the great hill. Presently he stopped, looked upward to the grey forehead of the tor, and he noted that his wife was sitting quietly there, watching him. Only then his soul sickened, and he found it in his heart to call upon God to spare her. For she sat very near the spot where first they had loved and worshipped each other. He hesitated, but strode on again; and presently she rose and disappeared.

A track over the heavy fens between the tor and the peat-works was known to Sarah Jane, and now she followed it, while her child ran on before.

Soon they entered the familiar ruin and took their way to the great drum. There, in dead heath and fern, little Gregory rested awhile; then he called for his favourite toy.

"Not yet, my dicky-bird," she said. "You've got something to do for mother first. Look over there—down to the end of the path—who be that coming after us?"

The child uttered an exclamation of surprise and pleasure.

"Daddy! Daddy back home again!" he said.

"So it is, then. And I've got a letter here that you must take to him. Such a man you be now! Here 'tis—you run down along with it and tell him mother's sent it. Quick! How fast he's walking!"

She gave her child the letter and a long kiss. After that he trotted off to meet his father.

Sarah Jane watched him; then turned and took his toy from its hiding-place. It was the famous old knife which she had seen so often in her father's hand. The blade was blunt, but that mattered not, for her Roman spirit turned to the point.

"'Tis my heart did wrong," she said; "'tis my heart——"

The child ran to Brendon and jumped into his arms, as he was wont to do.

"A letter from mother, daddy," he cried; "I've carried it safe for 'e."

Deep soul movements had swept Daniel as he climbed to the crowns of the land. He began to ask himself questions; his heart shook and bled within him; he prayed to his God; he humbly implored his God; but no answer came. Therefore he went onward—since the Almighty's mind was unshaken. Then came the child, and he took the letter and doubted not that the Father of Mercy had, even at this last hour, dictated it to her who sent it. Now he was to learn what he must do. While he opened it he walked on, until he had reached within fifty yards of the ruin.

After he had read it, he stood still a moment and considered. He doubted not that his wife's eyes were upon him.

The letter was very short:—

"*My dear, they say you have come. I know. I'll spare you that.—Your true love.*"

The man lifted his voice at last.

"I can't do it—God forgive me, I can't—I can't. Make your peace with Him, as I shall. Live out your life on your knees for ever, as I shall. I'm going. You shall never see me no more."

Then he spoke to the child.

"Get to your mother," he said.

Gregory, frightened at his face and voice, ran back as fast as he could go, and Brendon departed. But a moment later, when shrill shriek upon shriek cut his ears, he stopped, turned again, and went to his child; because he knew that the little thing was alone.

CHAPTER XV

SET OF MOON

On a night at mid-December, in a darkened room, Daniel Brendon sat writing laboriously. The candle beside him was shielded so that the light should fall only on his papers, on a copy of the "War Cry," and on his Bible. In a corner were two beds, side by side, and his boy occupied the smaller one and slept peacefully there. Upon a chair by the little bed Gregory's clean clothes were placed for the morrow. A small scarlet jersey hung close by, and beside it a very large one, that Daniel would wear.

Brendon had joined the Salvation Army and was captain of the Lydford Branch. Indeed, he had founded this branch, and worked like a giant by night and day to increase its strength. Twenty-five persons were already numbered.

He rose up and stretched his arms; then sat down and read through the notes that he had made. To-morrow the man would preach from the twelfth chapter of Job and the twenty-second verse.

"He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death."

The child laughed in his sleep and then was still again. A clock struck four.

Brendon appeared to be much aged; he did not spare himself in his unceasing struggles for his God. Only at such moments as this, in the waste of night, when life's pulses burned low; when his own agony surged high; when human powerlessness to stem the tide of the world's grief was most borne in upon his spirit, did he waver and look forward hungrily to the end. For a moment now he put his great hands over his face and longed for the time when the dust of the workshop should be still, the dust of the workman at rest.

John Prout and his sister received all Woodrow's money—a sum sufficient for their needs until life's end. Brendon had sold Ruddyford; and the payment, in shape of notes, he burnt. Now he fought under the banner of the new sect that already foreshadowed its coming power.

He rose presently, gazed upon the night and started at what he saw.

"Blood and Fire in heaven too!" he thought.

Behind the mass of Lydford castle a moon, just short of fall, was sinking amid vast clouds. Some were very dark and some were luminous; some, while circled with flame, yet moved in masses unutterably black. The firmament seemed troubled by this conflagration. The setting moon, surrendering her silver, took upon her bosom the tinctures of earth; and the stormy clouds burnt with her stained radiance. Above them the light exhaled and shot upward into heaven, where stars shone through the vaporous floor of the sky. Orion wheeled his far-flung glories westward and followed the red moon.

The wonder of this silent and nocturnal pageant endured awhile; then it slowly died away. The planet flashed a farewell ruby above the edge of the world, and dreamless darkness brooded upon earth for a little space before the dawn.

THE END

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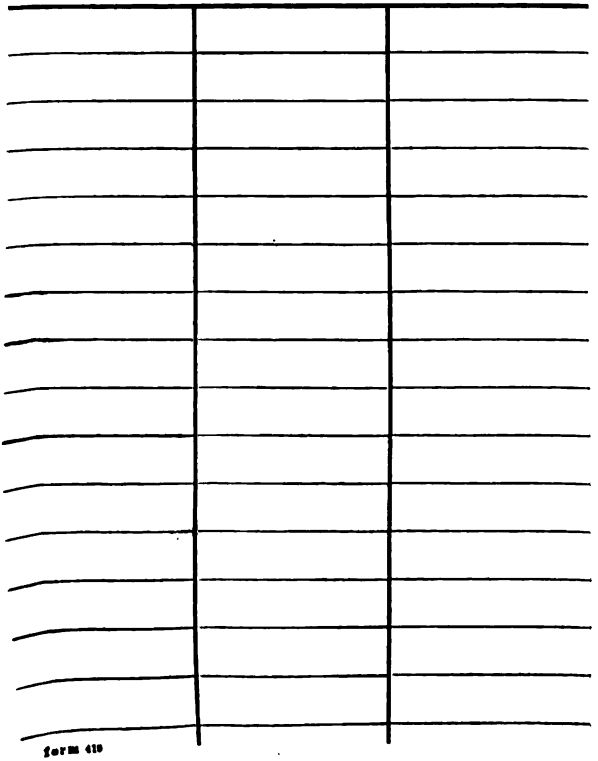

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